

**ZONDERVAN
PRACTICAL
MINISTRY GUIDES**

GREETER



SERVING AS A CHURCH GREETER

FORMERLY TITLED *THE GREETER'S MANUAL*

PAUL E. ENGLE, SERIES EDITOR

LESLIE PARROTT

ZONDERVAN



**SERVING AS A
CHURCH GREETER**

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 **ZONDERVAN®**
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Formerly titled *The Greeter's Manual*

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To two of the best church greeters I ever knew,
Chet and Bernita Hill,
who helped make the foyer of their church
a place of organized friendliness
and mutual acceptance

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Back when ushering was still a stepchild in many churches, the idea of an official group of warmhearted church greeters had not even been conceived—certainly not born. In earlier days, the local congregation focused on the basic ministries that met the needs of members in an agrarian society. In those days, churches were primarily interested in preaching, home visitation, and care of the sick. Church greeting, as an official member of the church's family of lay services, was a long time coming.

HOW GREETERS CAME TO BE

In that former era, the parson (Old English for “the person”) was a lone figure in the community who had no staff of either lay or ordained people to extend or specialize the ministry of the church. There were no Christian education wings on church buildings; fellowship halls were nonexistent. Laypeople attended services, paid their tithes, and were ministered to by the preacher. Except for raising an occasional barn, most good works were private.

Most congregations began their family of lay ministries with the birth of a Sunday school. The idea of a *teacher* in the church was conceived, and, in due time, the eldest child in the family of Christian volunteers was born. The model for the Sunday school was the one-room public school. Patterned after the pastor, the Sunday school teacher was an authority figure who stood up front and lectured the pupils—children or adults—as though they were sitting in a church service.

Soon after the need for a Sunday school had been generally accepted in local churches came the idea of “special” music beyond the accustomed congregational singing. Music by choirs, small groups, and soloists was rapidly embraced as an important ministry for lay volunteers. Except for the more sophisticated city churches, ushers during this early era of developing lay church ministries were primarily offering-takers. In many churches, ushers functioned part-time, sitting with their wives in their customary pews, offering plate in hand, waiting for the pastor to “call” them into

service. Once the offering was taken, the ushers returned to their places in the pews, satisfied that their service had been rendered.

In those early days, there were no God-called “youth ministers” in the modern sense of the idea, except for a specialized group of young evangelists gifted in converting teens to Jesus Christ and enfolding them into the church. Young married couples in the congregation supported each other and fulfilled their parenting responsibilities in the best way they could. Raising children was strictly a family concern and not a responsibility of the church. And senior citizens had not yet been discovered as the Very Important Persons they have come to be.

The family of lay volunteers in evangelical churches expanded noticeably about the time churches began to focus on these differentiated needs among people in the congregation. Pastors and congregations began realizing their single-barreled shotgun approach did not hit the needs of all church members evenly. Ideas for better quality and more specific Christian service to all age groups and interest groups within the church spawned the age of trained volunteers and the rise of a professional staff to serve as teachers and ministers for specific groups such as children, youth, senior citizens, and graded choirs.

Later, ushers were among these church workers who were recognized as important and who needed to be recruited carefully and trained adequately for the much needed service they were to render.

And now the time has come when most churches recognize the need to recruit, organize, train, and motivate a cadre of the right kinds of people to officially represent the pastor and church. The greeter is the vehicle through which the church board and congregation can provide to its own people, and especially to newcomers, a personal expression of Christian warmth and welcome. Greeting is now a ministry all its own. And, in the case of the warmest and friendliest congregations, this ministry of the church greeter extends beyond the foyer, or lobby. It begins in the parking lot.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CUSTOMER

The birth of greeters as an official organization for Christian service was probably given impetus by the national and international attention shift in business philosophy from what had been a singular focus on the product to

a concern for the customer who is the potential buyer and user of the product.

Important books and studies by nationally recognized authorities have stimulated this new focus on the customer. These include the following:

1. *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations* by Philip Kotler (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975). Kotler brought the customer concept into the classroom, even into some seminaries. One of his major chapters was called “The Responsive Organization: Meeting Customer Needs.”
2. *In Search of Excellence* by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr. (New York: Warner Books, 1988, reissue edition). Originally published in 1982, their influential study included such chapters as “Close to the Customer” and “Hands-On, Value-Driven.”
3. Peter Drucker, probably the most prestigious authority and writer on business affairs since World War II, made a sudden shift in his work in the early 1990s to give his time and energy for the rest of his life to the study of nonprofit organizations, including the church. In volume 1 of his monumental series of training tapes, Drucker says, “The church must look on the outside for an opportunity of need which can be met on the inside. The church is people-driven and must be highly sensitized to their needs.”
4. *Learned Optimism* by Martin Seligman (New York: Pocket Books, 1998, reissue edition). If he were a pastor—and he is not—I’m sure Seligman would put his best people on the front line in the foyer to welcome the folks and to create the warm atmosphere that is basic in serving the needs of a congregation.

ORGANIZED FRIENDLINESS

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the ministry of church greeters. In earlier times, the pastor used his access to the pulpit to urge people toward greater friendliness in the church. But the ideal of a friendly congregation did not include the thought of well-organized church greeters in the foyer. If there was an attempt at church-door friendliness, the pastor, who was sometimes joined in the foyer by his wife, was it. But even in this

instance, the pastor's expression of friendliness was given to the people as they *left* the sanctuary, not as they arrived.

Today, however, organized friendliness that focuses on the needs of worshipers from the time they enter the parking lot until they are seated in the pew is made effective by an official group of people who have the gifts and graces to express social warmth and are willing to commit their time and energy to this ministry.

Like other kinds of Christian service, the importance of greeters in the foyer has steadily increased, and their work has been institutionalized into a regular lay ministry of the church. The head greeter is chosen with the same care once invested in the choosing of a Sunday school superintendent. And the result of the work of greeters, when done well, is a plus factor in the church's total ministry. Every church can, and must, have an effective group of official greeters.

Church greeters need to be carefully recruited, effectively organized, adequately trained, and fully motivated. An honest smile and a heartfelt handshake may be a cup of cold water given in Christ's name to a thirsty soul. This little book is intended to be a guide for these purposes.

George Burns once told an acting class that the most important quality in an actor is sincerity. "And if you can fake sincerity, you've got it made." The fact is, you can't. Affected sincerity is as phony as a three-dollar bill, but when kindness and friendliness are sincere, greeting becomes a ministry.

[FILLING THE NEED](#)

This practical ministry guide is written to fill three specific needs in churches that take their warmhearted ministry of greeting seriously:

1. *The need for motivation.* Many churches need an increased appreciation for the importance of a church greeters' ministry. Far too many congregations expect a warm spirit of Christian friendliness to inhabit the foyer of the church without any strategy to make it happen. When the pastor begins to understand the importance of the greeting task and clarifies it as a priority, then the greeters themselves will move toward a standard of excellence that will lift their work to the level of ministry.

2. *The need for a ready reference tool.* Taken as a whole, *Serving as a Church Greeter* can be a helpful tool for improving the quality of greeting in your church. However, each greeter also needs a copy of this book for his or her own purposes. Work out individual problems according to the code of common sense appropriate for your local situation. Just as no two congregations are alike, no two greeters are the same. Therefore, some suggestions in this guide may miss the mark for specific persons in certain situations. Avoid the consequences of rigidity. Do not just *adopt* this manual blindly, but use common sense in *adapting* its ideas and guidelines to your particular church and to your assignment as a church greeter.
3. *The need for training classes.* *Serving as a Church Greeter* is uniquely suited for use as a teaching text in local churches. It can serve as a study guide for training classes where ideas are discussed and local strategies and procedures are developed. It can profitably be read in private and studied by underlining important thoughts. The content and application of the material can be expanded by using the questions for reflection and discussion that are included at the end of each chapter.

As the writer of this practical ministry guide, my prayer is that you and your church will enjoy a more effective greeting ministry because you've taken time to study the helps provided in the five chapters of this book.

—Leslie Parrott

ONE

The Ministry of Church Greeters

Churches regularly sustain the same hierarchy in Sunday morning ministries. It is not planned that way; it just is. Some things that happen in church on Sunday morning are high on people's priority list; others are not. What some people contribute to a worship service is often recognized by a congregation as more valuable to Christian nurturing than what others do.

THE HIERARCHY OF MINISTRIES

The following hierarchy of Sunday morning ministries is broadly accepted:

Preaching

If anyone's name is on the permanent outdoor church sign, it is the man or woman who usually occupies the Sunday morning pulpit. It is not uncommon for the name of the person preaching the sermon to appear in bold type in the church bulletin. People may even express disappointment when they arrive at church to find that the regular preaching minister is absent and someone else is in the pulpit.

I attended a service one time while Arthur Calliandro was serving as assistant minister to Norman Vincent Peale at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City. When I arrived, I was greeted on the front steps by Dr. Calliandro, who had been engaged in a serious conversation with the head greeter. I overheard the usher say to Dr. Calliandro, "I feel sorry for you." Moments later I learned that Dr. Peale was home in bed, sick with the flu, and the assistant pastor was to preach in his place. Like everybody else, I was disappointed, but unlike everybody else, I considered leaving. After the service, I was glad I had stayed, for Dr. Callian-dro preached a good sermon that ended with an absorbing story I have remembered even after all these years.

The apostle Paul, who wrote about the “foolishness of what was preached” (1 Corinthians 1:21), also wrote, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). Most of us will agree with Paul about the paradox of preaching and agree with the churchgoing public that preaching is the first priority on the Sunday morning worship agenda.

Teaching

Next to preaching, Martin Luther believed that teaching was the highest calling from God. Teaching is mentioned scores of times in the New Testament. Jesus was called Teacher and often taught in both Galilee and Judea. Teaching is listed among the spiritual gifts (see Romans 12:7). On his missionary journeys, Paul went first to the synagogues where he taught from the Scriptures. It is fully Christian and biblical that great numbers of people in churches everywhere are committed to teaching—a ministry that approximates the importance of preaching in the hierarchy of Sunday morning ministries.

The pastor who preaches without teaching (or the church that evangelizes without nurturing the converts) is obscuring the full purpose of the cross and is missing one of the vital ministries of the Holy Spirit: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and . . . will guide you into all truth” (John 14:26; 16:13).

Celebrating with Music to the Glory of God

I can remember an era in the church I attended when music consistently rivaled the impact of preaching and teaching in Sunday worship. The just-right combination of a superb organist, a polished professional pianist, and a nationally known minister of music, who directed a carefully recruited choir, had brought the ministry of our church music to an inspiring level. There were mornings when the singing lifted the people to a worship plateau typically reserved for the pastor’s sermon. The music consistently fulfilled the admonition of the apostle Paul, “Let the word of Christ dwell in

you richly . . . as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

However, whether or not the music electrifies the worship atmosphere is not the point. Churchgoing people love music. And a church with inspiring music is likely to have a larger congregation for the sermon than a church without inspiring music.

Organized Friendliness of Greeters

The ministry of church greeters is a late bloomer in the family of volunteer Christian services. It is an adjunct to preaching, teaching, and music. But it is a ministry—a very important one, and one that is becoming more important. Sinner and saint understand the language of kindness equally well. When someone is emotionally down, an ounce of kindness is worth a pound of preaching. This is one of the reasons church greeters have an important ministry. Anyone can pass out bulletins. But Christian kindness is a ministry for church greeters who care deeply about people.

THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT

All churches need to rise to the occasion as modern-day counterparts to the ancient doorkeepers in the house of the Lord. Congregations without an organized greeters’ ministry need to create one. Others need to improve the ministry already in place. This is especially true in small and mid-sized congregations that have lagged behind their more aggressive counterparts in large churches. And all churches, large and small, need to celebrate organized friendship along with the psalmist, who wrote, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! . . . I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked” (Psalm 84:1, 10).

The biblical reminder of the importance of a doorkeeper ministry comes from an ancient family chronicle. The spirit of family pride shines through in the story of Shallum, who was a member of the fourth generation among the “fellow gatekeepers from his family . . . responsible for guarding the thresholds of the Tent just as their fathers had been responsible for guarding the entrance to the dwelling of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 9:19). Serving as a

doorkeeper in the house of the Lord was no small matter in those days. Neither is it now.

From the tabernacle to the temple to the synagogue to the New Testament church, the ministry of greeting has taken on increasing importance. For more than three hundred years, Christians worshiped mainly in homes or house churches. Therefore the host actually welcomed the worshipers into his own home.

In Rome, where Christians were afraid to gather openly in homes, they appropriated the catacombs—an interlinked system of tunnels beneath the city—for their places of worship. It takes little imagination to visualize the personal warmth and the authentic welcome extended to each other as one isolated Christian after another slipped past the guards to join the underground believers for worship.

Friendship is at the very heart of Christian brotherhood. It has been there from the beginning. All the modern church has added to the important atmosphere of mutual acceptance in the New Testament church is the identification of volunteer greeters as an organized group. Thankfully, the work of greeters in the modern-day church has been organized and institutionalized as a recognized ministry in the family of Christian volunteers. Their much needed gifts and graces have been honed by adequate training and experience to raise their level of effectiveness, and the church foyer has been designated as their place of service. In warmhearted churches everywhere, official church greeters have become the doers of a recognized ministry based on a biblical precedent.

[THE ONE-ANOTHER MINISTRY](#)

No assignment in the church is more one-on-one than the ministry of greeters. The foyer is their chapel, the information desk their pulpit, and the walk-around spaces their parish.

In contrast to the greeters at the doors of the church, pastors welcome the congregation en masse, often from behind a self-protecting pulpit. As some have noted, pastors stand several steps above contradiction, while they literally look down on the people. Teachers welcome classes in the isolation of small rooms behind closed doors. Choir members wear robes intended to obscure individual personalities and blend a large number of persons into a

single unit as they sing their call to worship. Some choir members don't even look at the people as they sing their choral welcome but keep their eyes fixed on the director. But church greeters have a one-another ministry—face to face, hand to hand, heart to heart with the people they are called to serve. Church greeters in large churches may minister in a number of parking lots or in mammoth foyers, but their Christian service is to one customer at a time, just as it is in the smallest church. And to make their work even more important, church greeters are the first people others meet when arriving at church.

On Main Street, out where people make their daily bread, there has arisen an intense interest concerning first impressions made on customers as they enter a place of business. The directors of a bank's board on which I served often expressed their concern that tellers, who are the first line of encounter with customers, are at the bottom of the totem pole in terms of salaries and status. In our bank, the best paid people worked with secretaries behind closed doors in order to guard their offices against random access and thus conserve the banker's time and energy for important matters. But down on the main floor where customers came and went, the ambassadors of goodwill were people serving at entry-level jobs.

I've often wondered if people's perceptions of church greeters in some congregations may be similarly confused. Are people who don't sing in the choir, teach classes, or serve as ushers—are these people chosen to serve as church greeters because they lack talents in these other areas? I hope not! Low esteem, little reward, and almost no recognition have often been the lot of church greeters who serve on the front lines. In churches where this attitude prevails, it is high time for change.

If the apostle Paul were alive today, he would have something to say to church greeters—the same message he gave to Christians serving a remote assignment in Colosse: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart. . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23–24).

Church greeting must be elevated to its full status as a one-another ministry. What people will not do for money, they will do free of charge and with great loyalty if they are accorded recognition and can feel a sense of ministry in their assignment.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he refers to the one-another ministry seven times. Each of these admonitions works together with all the others to create a spiritual and biblical base for the ministry of church greeters.

Accept One Another

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you” (Romans 15:7). This is the ministry of mutual acceptance. It rests on Jesus Christ’s teaching of unconditional love, which is free from color bias, racial prejudice, and inordinate concern for status.

A verbal greeting and the offer of a handshake are ways of focusing on the other person. These words and gestures say, “You are somebody. You matter to me. I’m glad you’re here. I want you to feel welcome.”

On the other hand, the church greeter who has difficulty shifting the focus from within himself or herself outward to the other person is falling short. The important question is not “How am I doing?” or “How do I look?” but “How are they doing?” and “How do they feel?”

The choir welcomes people from the elevated choir loft; the pastor welcomes people from behind the pulpit; the teacher welcomes pupils from within the classroom. But it is the business of greeters to receive people as soon as they arrive at church. It is the church greeter who is out there on the firing line, dealing with people firsthand in a one-on-one setting without the advantage of intervening buffers. The greeter absorbs whatever attitudes and pent-up feelings the worshiper has brought to church. Therefore, the welcome from the greeter may be happily received, or on occasion he or she may be called on to absorb the negative effects of someone’s unresolved stress. Sadly, for some people, too much happiness too early in the morning just brings out their worst side.

However, the effective church greeter never shows signs of recoiling from a negative barb, a slight incivility, or even a harsh word from some harried worshiper who is more occupied with his own thoughts than with the need to respond to a greeting. Greeters—ignore the problems, but receive the people. As Jesus has received us with unconditional love, accept each and every person who comes through your church door—just as they are, warts and all.

Honor One Another

“Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10). This is the one-another ministry of an encouraging word. One of the skills developed by the most effective kinds of church greeters is the capacity to come up with a

few words—even a one-liner—that enhances someone’s moment of entry through the church door.

This need to recognize other people with a word that attaches to their purpose is important. Since most families tend to arrive at about the same time each Sunday and enter through the same door, it’s good for the greeter to be sensitive to them as people with whom they are developing an ongoing relationship of sorts. It doesn’t take much concentration to be aware of the achievements, concerns, and hopes among the regulars you face each Sunday. Any inquiry into the well-being of a married child in another town, any concern about the crops that need to be harvested, any kind thought about the physical condition of an ill family member, any word of congratulations on the passing of a child to the next grade—these are the raw materials from which words of encouragement come.

Be Kind to One Another

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (Romans 12:10). This is the one-another ministry of kindness. Acts of kindness are the sweet-smelling essence of a heavenly aroma. Nothing perfumes the air like an act of kindness.

Many people come to church on Sunday weary from a week of frustration. They need to be uplifted. They have not come to church for an additional burden but to receive help in carrying the one they already have. Their self-image may already have been assaulted with more than their fair share of rejection and self-doubt. What they need to experience is a greeter with an understanding heart. It is the church greeter who opens the door to a kindly church, to the ministry of a helpful pastor, and to the potential of a spiritually refreshing worship experience. High in the priorities of the human heart is the need for acceptance. The human race lives with an insatiable desire for the milk of human kindness. It is not a parking lot greeter’s place to rebuke drivers for failing to stay within the lines; he or she is there to minister through kindness. It is impossible for a church greeter to fake a smile and be believed if his or her body language sends a rebuke to the entering worshiper. Kindness, kindness, kindness—these are three basic qualities of a church greeter.

Love One Another

“Love one another” (Romans 13:8). This is the one-another ministry of unconditional goodwill. This is the fulfilling ministry: “For he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). This kind of love is expressed in a positive attitude toward people in general. It is a love that bans verbal abuse from any and all communications. It is an attitude of love toward life in general and people in particular.

In the ancient world where Paul lived, there were three common kinds of love spoken of by people on the streets of Greek and Roman cities:

1. Sometimes people used the word *love* to express the intense concern of a man for a woman. This is sexual love.
2. Other times people used the word *love* to talk about the strong bond among people who are legally connected through birth or marriage. This is family love, and it is quite different from sexual love.
3. Finally, people in the ancient world sometimes used the word *love* to express the mutual bond of respect and appreciation people have for each other just because they like one another. This is love for a friend.

To these three kinds of love—sexual, family, and friendship—Jesus added another, namely, *agape*. This unconditional love is expressed in abounding goodwill toward people who may or may not have earned it and may or may not accept it. This is love without prior conditions. It is unconditional. *Agape* love makes it possible for Christians to owe no one anything except to love one another. The church greeter who can love each person unconditionally renders a high level of Christian service at the church door.

Understand One Another

“Let us stop passing judgment on one another” (Romans 14:13). This is Paul’s only negative one-another statement. However, a judgmental attitude can ultimately be overcome only by a spirit of understanding. The change from a judgmental to an understanding mind requires a personal decision and a self-discipline empowered by the Holy Spirit. In his full expression of this one-another admonition, Paul said, “Therefore, let us stop passing

judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."

The church greeter also has a responsibility to measure up to life's moral twin peaks of integrity and purity. It is most unfortunate for a greeter on Sunday morning to be confronted at the door of the church by someone who has seen him or her in a compromising situation. It is the greeter's business to be nonjudgmental toward all who come through the door of the church. But it is even more the business of the greeter to be sure his or her life is not a stumbling block to others, particularly to someone in the fellowship of the congregation.

Instruct One Another

"Instruct one another" (Romans 15:14). The best church greeters are role models in the Christian graces. Church greeters are pilgrims, not proclaimers. They teach by being, doing, and demonstrating, not by telling, admonishing, and finger-pointing.

It is not the business of the greeter to instruct people—in the usual meaning of the word *instruct*. But it is very much the business of the greeter to be secure in himself or herself, to come across as a Christian who is living confidently in the faith, which fortifies people. Church greeters become role models in direct proportion to the degree of Christian faith and happiness evident in their own life. Christians are gracious to each other when they feel good about themselves.

Greet One Another

"Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16). This is the ministry of human touch, a gray area in social expression that needs to be understood and used carefully. Only in recent decades have conservative Americans begun to discover the healing quality of the human touch. Children will stand in line to be hugged by their teacher. Some popular lecturers in psychology have made hugging the thing to do. Hugging is the easy therapy of the day, which some people have adopted as the fullest expression of personal acceptance and appreciation.

Lloyd Ogilvie, current chaplain of the United States Senate, tells the story of a rancher from Montana who came to the church Ogilvie once served in Hollywood and lined up to greet the pastor at the end of the service. In a broad Montana brogue, which fit a man from the country of the big sky, he drawled, “I’ve come all the way from Montana to get my hug.” In the sign-off segment from the Hollywood Presbyterian Church telecast, the rancher had seen Dr. Ogilvie hug some parishioners as they were leaving the church, and now this rancher had come expecting his hug. And he got it.

Considerable discretion is needed in the use of human touch. The “holy kiss” or the hug is almost never appropriate in greeting strangers at the church door. The gesture might well be resisted or even resented. Not all people, even those we know well, want to be touched beyond a handshake, nor should they be. But Paul’s references to the “holy kiss” in his Corinthian correspondence are unmistakable: “All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss” (1 Corinthians 16:20). And in his second letter to the Corinthians, he repeats his exhortation: “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12).

For many people, the friendly hug, or the buzz on the cheek, has become a warm way of expressing affection. However, most greeters still feel the handshake is the proper Sunday morning greeting. Instead of taking Paul’s admonition literally, a handshake may be the answer for a church greeter who wants to express a genuine Christian welcome in the fullest way possible, but not with a literal kiss or hug.

Serve One Another: Counsel for the Galatian Believers

Paul has one more one-another saying, which he included in his letter to the Galatians but not in his correspondence to the Romans. To these people who were having great difficulty in ridding themselves of their legalistic bias in the plan of salvation, Paul wrote, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13). This is the one-another ministry of service, and it is surely the final word to church greeters who are called to serve. Set free from the Christian legalism that often leads to spiritual pride and condescension, the greeter is equipped to welcome people as they

are and not as he or she might *wish* they were. This is the ultimate ideal in the one-another ministry of church greeters.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the hierarchy of ministries in your church, and how do these relate to the role and recognition of the greeters?
2. What do you know about Shallum in the Old Testament, and what do he and his family have to do with the importance of church greeters today?
3. How does the idea of a house church in the New Testament relate to the idea and ministry of church greeters?
4. Can you find ways to relate each of the one-another sayings of Paul to the ministry of greeters in your church? Explain.
5. Can you report on a church you've known that has made an exemplary ministry out of organized Christian friendliness?

TWO

The Need for Warmhearted Greeters

Research conducted by social scientist Daniel Yankelovich a number of years ago indicated that 70 percent of adult Americans have many acquaintances but few close friends. One must wonder if this is also true in the average congregation. Since Americans seem to feel the need for more closeness, this may be why the highest virtue among church greeters is their willingness to express human kindness. A warmhearted church and a kindhearted greeter go together like the pulpit and the sermon. In church work there is no warmth without kindness. Coolness is usually rudeness.

When church greeters allow their ministry to become officious by ordering people around, the good they hope to do becomes a stumbling block. Even being efficient in directing the flow of traffic is usually unproductive to relationships. Suggest, lead, guide—or do anything else that is an extension of the human smile—but don't order people. Be a warmhearted friend, not an officer.

THE NEED FOR HUMAN KINDNESS

The one common denominator that brings everyone down to the same level of equality is the need for human kindness, which is why Peter placed kindness above godliness and just below unconditional love in his hierarchy of Christian graces: “. . . and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love” (2 Peter 1:7).

Kindness to New People Who Feel Strange and Don't Know Their Way Around

When Paul wrote about his shipwreck on the island of Malta, the first thing he mentioned was the islanders' kindness expressed toward him and the other strangers who had landed on their beach: “The islanders showed

us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold” (Acts 28:2). And the modern-day strangers who come out of the rain and cold of the weekday hassle into the sanctuary of your church will respond to that same flame that kindles human kindness.

Kindness to the Elderly Who Increasingly Feel Alone

In one of the bonding conversations that nourished their deep friendship, Jonathan said to David as they walked through the fields, “But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live . . . and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family” (1 Samuel 20:14–15). As people grow older, kindness becomes increasingly important. If you want to minister to the Jonathans of this world, just let them hear that you have been kind to their family, especially to their elderly loved ones.

Kindness to the Children Who Are outside Their Comfort Zone

Hosea wrote some wonderful words about kindness to Israel, whom he called a child: “When Israel was a child . . . I led them with chords of human kindness . . . I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them” (Hosea 11:1, 4). The most loved greeter in our church was a man who had a way with children who were uncomfortable in the spaces and with the sounds of a large foyer and the labyrinth of church corridors where people moved about and carried on loud conversations.

It is important to remember that small children may be easily lost or confused. They may be overpowered by the sight of strange adults who look like hordes of giants, or they may just be uncertain of themselves in an unfamiliar setting. This good man always bent down, or even kneeled, to say a reassuring word to a child who needed encouragement. Because he had a reputation for being filled with love for children, he was deeply appreciated by both the children and their parents—even their grandparents. In an era of broken homes, abuse, and loveless families, children are open more than ever to the ministry of a loving greeter. When a child needs a hug, give it to him or her.

Kindness to Mothers with Babies in Their Arms and Toddlers at Their Sides

Harried young mothers may be strong enough to do all they do, but they also are amenable to acts of kindness. Making a load lighter by lifting a package, opening the door, or helping a small child up the steps is more than a social civility. It's a way of saying, "We're glad you're here," and, "Good things are waiting for you in this church."

Kindness to People Who Show Up Regularly at the Same Time and at the Same Door Every Week

The dependable people who attend regularly may show no visible need for kindness. They may seem uninterested in your welcome greeting. But be friendly anyway, because the rewards in your ministry do not depend on reciprocation from the people you greet but on the love of the Lord whom you serve.

Kindness toward the Pastor and Staff, Who Sometimes Need an Advocate at the Door

If someone feels the need to say an unkind word about your pastor or a staff member, find a way to come down on the pastor's side. The minister's load is big enough without a greeter adding to his or her burden by reinforcing someone's negative feelings.

Kindness to People Who Have Physical Challenges

People who need specialized help because of physical problems may also need extra amounts of kindness and thoughtfulness. They may even learn to enter by your door exclusively, just because they need the hug or loving pat on the shoulder you can be counted on to give. It is always good to anticipate the needs of people who use wheelchairs, crutches, or walkers. Elderly persons and folks with disabilities need more time and more space than others—and more of the kindness you can provide.

Kindness to People Who Don't Seem to Need It

Sometimes kindness is misunderstood. When Peter and John were called before the court after the healing of the lame man in Acts 3, Peter began his speech to the judge by saying, “If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple . . . ” (Acts 4:9). In Jerusalem, or wherever you live, there are people who will resist your greeting ministry—even when it is extended in kindness. The unlovable alcoholics who wander in, the angry teenager who sulks as she comes in the door, the sullen neurotic who is out of tune with life, and even the vagrant who manipulates Christian humanitarianism for his own purposes are not immune to a kind attitude—even when they don't respond favorably. We are not admonished to be kind to the people we like, but to *each other*, whomever the “other” may be.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = ice-cold; 10 = red-hot), just how warmhearted do you think your church is toward strangers or people who are different from them?
2. What are some things greeters in your church can do to warm up the atmosphere in the foyer?
3. What should a church greeter say to someone who speaks negatively about the pastor or someone on the staff?
4. How well does the level of love in your church contribute toward saving your children and transmitting the gospel to the next generation?

THREE

Developing a User-Friendly Foyer

In Philip Kotler's book *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975, page 33), he says, "A responsive church is one which makes every effort to be sensitive to the needs and wants of those who participate. People who have firsthand knowledge of these kinds of churches almost always report a high level of personal satisfaction, such as 'This is the best church I have ever attended.'"

Other research by persons such as George Barna and Ken-non L. Callahan builds on Kotler's concern for the needs of the people by confirming the high priority among all churchgoers for good relationships. One pastor in a thriving church stated that he had learned the hard way that people do not bond to the church, the denomination, or even the worship services. People bond to *each other*. This building of friendships and relationships may be ultimately fulfilled in the small groups people join, but it begins in the foyer, or church lobby.

THE CHURCH FOYER MINISTRY

People meet each other in the foyer before and after every service. If the foyer is only a means of entry and exit, its possibilities for friendliness become lost opportunities. There is a ministry in the foyer, facilitated by the greeters and presided over by a spiritual maître d' called the head greeter. He or she and the coworkers make or break the foyer as a user-friendly area. This chapter identifies and explains some of the many issues and concerns surrounding a user-friendly foyer.

Multiple Entrances with Multiple Doors

Except for the small chapel or the one-room church, church members expect churches to have multiple entrances. These many doors open the way into the church facilities from Christian education buildings, gymnasiums, office complexes, family centers, or parking lots. And at each of these doors there needs to be a qualified greeter in place, ready to extend a warm welcome to everyone.

Sometimes the main entrance to a church is served by a set of double doors with hinges on opposite sides of the frame. When I enter churches that have one of these multiple doors locked and a sign that says, “Use Other Door,” I can’t help but wonder what occasion would merit opening both doors. Who are they trying to keep out, or slow down? It seems as though the church should be the easiest place in the world to enter. Surely our worship times are important enough to warrant opening all the doors to all the entrances for whomever wants to use them.

Some Kinds of Doors Are Better Than Others

If possible, install doors with lots of appeal. Heavily varnished or painted doors look as though they belong to a private club. But church doors call for lots of glass—the more the better. If possible, install solid-glass doors with lots of inviting light outside and inside the entrance to help make the approach say, “Welcome.” Let strangers see what is going on inside the foyer. It is intimidating for the uninitiated to face a huge dark door and wonder what they might find on the other side.

From the Car Door to the Church Door

The distance from the parked car to the church door can be, for some people, the most frustrating segment in the weekly trip from home to church. Gravel that rolls underfoot is a hazard to women in thin-soled, high-heeled shoes. Watery holes in unpaved lots are an invitation to small children to stamp their feet. And the dust kicked up by gusts of wind takes its toll on the dressed-up look of people headed for the entrances.

In small churches, the parking area may be fairly near the door, but it is often unpaved. In large churches, the parking lot may be paved, but it can require a significant walk from the car to the building. In the largest churches, there may be multiple lots, some even requiring families to cross a street en route to the nearest church entrance.

Some people arrive for worship or a Sunday school class with their Bible, a load of books or a box of materials, or refreshments to be shared in a class. Others—sometimes even the same people—may arrive with one or more small children who need to be carried or guided through the parking lot to the church door.

No two churches use the same approach in meeting the needs of people who arrive in the family vehicle. Some churches have protective canopies so that the driver stops under the overhang to unload passengers and then proceeds to find a parking space. A few churches offer valet parking, particularly for people with special needs.

In either case, arriving passengers are often greeted by someone who helps open the car door and assists people as needed. Some churches with large or multiple parking lots provide vans or shuttle buses to carry people from the parking lot to the church door. Even churches with convenient parking often station greeters strategically for opening car doors, helping people out of their cars as needed, and generally easing the way from the car to the foyer. However, some churches ignore the possibilities of a parking lot ministry with an unwritten policy that says organized friendliness begins only at the church door.

Bulletins, Greeters, and Backup Greeters

Each church organizes its greeters to meet its own needs. Small churches may feel their needs are met by one couple or one greeter at the central entrance. Large churches may have determined that two or more couples or greeters are required to cover the needs in their foyer, while obscure doorways or secondary entrances may not need more than one couple or one greeter to welcome people.

However, the large churches I've visited that have a significant greeter ministry cover all entry doorways but usually station a front line of greeters at the entrances used most often by the most people. These greeters hold

bulletins in one hand and open doors with the other. They greet each person as he or she enters. Because of the traffic flow, only a moment can be spent with each person.

Behind the front line is a secondary team of greeters, deployed at an appropriate distance from the doors. They seek out persons they think need more attention, such as strangers, new attendees, or persons with special needs. These greeters usually direct the new people to the visitor table or information booth. They take enough time with them to answer their questions and as much as possible to help them feel at ease.

Then back of the secondary line of greeters is one or two more people who are free to be used wherever the need is. It is the job of these greeters to keep people with needs from falling through the cracks. They also deal with special situations, often serving as a liaison with the pastor or the head usher on information that needs to be relayed to those in charge. This assignment is often handled by the head greeter.

After the service, the same greeters work their assigned zones in the foyer, where they keep a ministering eye for people who are new and who need to be introduced to others. These greeters should serve during the exit of the congregation just as they did when people were arriving. By all means, avoid what happened in one particularly disappointing instance, where the greeter at a back parking lot door in a very large church greeted the incoming people who had arrived for the next service, but ignored all who were leaving. People leaving the building chuckled about the church that was only interested in those who were coming and not those who had already been there.

The Ultimate in Greeter Strategy

Churches that are not effective in their greeter ministry fail typically because of one of three reasons: (1) They lack the know-how, (2) they fail to see the need, or (3) they are more interested in orthodoxy than in Christian friendship. From the zero point of no organized church greeters, churches can move up the line toward the ultimate friendship strategy.

The ultimate friendship strategy? *Every member of the church is a greeter.* Each regular attender has his or her own private ministry of making people feel welcome. Some churches have a friendship program, which

calls for every member to be sensitive to all persons seated within an arm's length of them and to take personal responsibility for greeting everyone within that radius. When my wife and I attended First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, we felt as though all the people around us were personally glad we had come. They couldn't say enough good things about their church. They almost talked us into attending their Sunday school class—even though we had already made another commitment.

Cleanliness and Creativity

The two “Cs” of concern for an attractive foyer are cleanliness and creativity. Pastors and lay leaders who live in cluttered homes often tolerate cluttered foyers at church. They don't see the dirt, the piles of leftover papers, the old announcements on the walls, and the lost paraphernalia strewn in the corners. To them, the foyer is not important as a gathering place. It is just an architectural means for getting from the front door into the sanctuary. But cleanliness and orderliness are important in a user-friendly foyer.

On a boat trip in the San Juan Islands, off the coast of Washington state, my wife and I left the dock on a Sunday morning and walked up the hill to a little white church with a Christopher Wren-type steeple. Both of us were immediately struck by the cleanliness of the foyer and the sanctuary. The windows sparkled. All the lightbulbs worked. The dominant color was white. There was no clutter. My wife turned to me and said, “This place must be under the charge of a lady custodian who knows how to keep her own house spotless.” A few moments later, the service started, and to our amazement the pastor was a woman. You may not have a woman pastor, but perhaps it would be a good idea to place the keeping of the foyer under the direction of a man or woman who has high standards when it comes to cleanliness and attractive surroundings.

The second “C” is creativity—an important word in the development of a user-friendly foyer. Seasonal decorations; signs that point the way so new people can navigate the halls of the church; a book table; the convenient placement of chairs, coat racks, benches and other conveniences; and other such amenities make the foyer a friendly place for churchgoers to gather.

Most foyers are too small, too dark, too cluttered, and too meaningless. There is lots of room for creativity in the foyer of the average church.

Paint, Wall Coverings, and Light Fixtures

The color and texture of the walls in the foyer can have a subtle influence on how people feel. When in doubt, use white paint. It is cheap, can be applied again as needed, and is amenable to the willing hands of volunteers. Dark wood, heavy wallpaper, and shaggy carpets have a tendency to condense spaces. Brighten up your walls. Lighten up your floor covering. Whiten your ceiling. The new feeling of airiness will be a boon to Christian sociability.

A friend of mine once borrowed money from a bank to open a small retail business. After the banker had approved the loan, he said, “I don’t know what your store building will look like on the inside, but I can tell you one thing: Double the amount of light, and the customers will spend more money.”

It is a fact that people tend to stay away from dark places. Darkness is intimidating. The fact is that doubling the amount of light in the foyers of most old churches would still not supply sufficient light. Most building committees run out of money by the time they come to ordering the lighting, and the temptation to cut down on fixtures and wattage is enticing. I have seen several adequately lit foyers but never one that had too much light. The early Christians left the catacombs many centuries ago, but architects still have a penchant for providing dark places for Christians to worship.

An Information/Reception Desk

The importance of an official information center dedicated to the before-and after-service needs of people is hard to overemphasize. People need a designated place to talk with a knowledgeable person about address changes, coming events, leaving and receiving messages, making a phone call, or expressing any concerns they may have.

When a greeter at the Washington Monument was asked which question she heard most often in her twenty years on the job, “Where is the rest

room?” was her response. It wouldn’t take long to make a list of the questions asked most often in the church foyer. And it wouldn’t take much longer to provide a ready list of answers and services.

Greeter Alertness

There are some things a greeter can’t be taught and reception-desk attendants can’t be trained to do. Many things happen in the foyer that are not on the schedule. Mental alertness and empathetic sensitivity are two precious possessions volunteers in the foyer need on a regular basis. When to give in, when to resist, when to give out certain information, and how to respond in an emergency are only learned by observation and experience. The pastor’s secretary doesn’t need to be asked to work in the reception center on Sundays, but someone of that caliber should be available in the foyer of most churches.

Pros and Cons of Name Tags

Some churches supply name tags for their visitors; other churches use name tags for everyone, including the pastor. If truth be told, most churches don’t use name tags at all. However, name tags can be very useful as a means of enhancing friendship when they are worn by everyone. Even folks who see each other regularly in church often may not be sure of someone else’s name.

Some people, however, resist the wearing of a name tag, feeling that it’s unnecessary because “I go to this church every Sunday, and everyone knows me.” If a name-tag program is begun, it needs to be thought through—with plenty of sign-up space and ample personnel assigned to make the system work. With the use of a computer, pages of peel-off alphabetized names can be prepared a month at a time and used individually as needed. (I know of one church that uses this system to determine the attendance record of its constituency. They have used the system for several years and are convinced of its reliability.)

A Place for Coats and Hats

In parts of the country where people are likely to wear coats and hats for significant periods of the year, places for hanging them are important. When I was a graduate student at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, one thing I enjoyed (and a service I admired) was their system for checking coats, hats, and boots in their student center. Not many churches have a vision for this kind of service to their people. But in the most user-friendly foyers, there is ample space for the placement and safekeeping of coats during church services.

The Importance of Floor Coverings

Attractive, serviceable floor coverings add warmth and beauty to a user-friendly foyer. Linoleum is the cheapest covering to buy but is likely to show wear before the church board is ready to replace it.

Contrasting black-and-white squares of vinyl almost always look stylish and clean-cut. But these squares require a cleaning regimen that can become a problem unless the church has willing volunteers or paid custodians. But when black-and-white floors are spotless, they are impressive, if not dramatic. And, if the situation calls for it, these floors will distract people from looking up at a low or unsightly ceiling.

Wall-to-wall carpeting can be handsome, although most churches are slow to spend the amount of money necessary for the kind of top-quality carpeting that can absorb the beating a foyer takes on a weekly basis. The floor-covering decision is in the end a matter of local choice, although consultation with a knowledgeable person (who has nothing to sell) may be a very good investment of time and energy.

Bulletin Boards

Every foyer needs an ample supply of bulletin boards, well arranged and kept up-to-date. A bulletin board for the pastors and staff members is essential. It needs to be ample in size, well-lighted, and continuously updated. Messages and posters lose some of their effectiveness each successive week they are left unchanged. Some large ministry organizations within the church may want their own bulletin board—which is a good idea

as long as it, too, is updated weekly and the displays are attractive. Teen bulletin boards are well received in churches with lots of young people.

The Sanctified Book Table

Although some people are uncomfortable with the idea of selling books because of money changing hands on Sunday, a well-maintained book table under the authority of a dependable person can add much to the value of lifelong learning and the importance of ministry in the church.

There is no such thing as a learning congregation without the pervasive habit of reading. And one of the best ways to encourage reading in a congregation is to provide members with the opportunity to buy books week after week. In most churches, it is better to dedicate the profits from book sales to some worthy cause in the church than to offer bargains to the purchasers. The success of this book-table venture will depend entirely on the person who is chosen to be in charge. However, a congregation that doesn't read is missing one of God's greatest means for providing personal and spiritual growth.

Adequate Space for a User-Friendly Foyer

Many churches have too many seats in the sanctuary and too little space in the foyer. Seldom is a church foyer too big. Churches need lots of space for people to mingle before and after church services. I know of a church that recently completed its new building with a foyer that also serves as a place for church dinners and banquets. It was the only way they could justify the space people thought they needed in order to have a really user-friendly foyer.

Background Music

Foyer music that invokes memory, is easily recognized, and is piped in softly may be a boon to some people but not necessarily to everyone. There is equipment available that will play a selected program, repeating itself multiple times. However, the churches I know of that pipe music into their

foyers do so primarily on weekdays to keep the church from seeming empty and dead.

Drinking Fountains

Perhaps it's only a personal hang-up, but the availability of drinking fountains is a problem in scores of churches where I've been invited to speak. When I ask an usher where the drinking fountain is, I'm usually given directions to some obscure place a long way away. Perhaps drinking fountains don't make it on the lists of church building committees when they consider the fine details in a building plan—or it's too far down the list to get full consideration. As a minimum, install a fountain somewhere in the main foyer with a second one in the hallway outside the choir room.

Also, for whatever it's worth, think about the need for a fountain that fits both children and adults. I've often helped a struggling child reach a drinking fountain when he or she wasn't yet tall enough to drink from an adult fountain.

Rest Rooms and Lounges

While personal facilities, including stations for changing diapers, are readily found in most churches, modest signs that point the way to the rest rooms typically are not. It is embarrassing to be forced to ask someone where the rest room is located—although the need for such facilities is universal and sometimes urgent. Make your rest rooms modern, up-to-date, clean, and readily available—and post a few signs so visitors can also know their location.

Special Issues with Regard to Multiple Services

The need for greeters in churches that have multiple services is often complicated by the overlapping schedules. Holding back a foyer full of people while another congregation exits takes all the diplomacy a greeting ministry can muster. Also, it takes more than twice as many greeters to serve the foyer needs of churchgoers when there is an option of more than

one service or Sunday school. Serving as greeters and parking lot attendants in a church with multiple services is an organizational challenge that needs to be taken up in a meeting of the entire corps of greeters. Everybody's input is needed—and yet the quality of the greeting ministry still may suffer. Trying to do too much in too small a space usually only multiplies the problems.

Canopies and Umbrellas

Bad weather calls for special skills among greeters. Greeters in churches without canopies—most churches, in fact—need a generous supply of large umbrellas to be used as car doors are opened in the rain or snow and families are assisted into the church. Each greeter needs to keep custody of his or her own umbrella and not pass it along to whomever needs it next. It is a personal piece of equipment for use in inclement weather so that greeters and parking lot workers can help protect worshipers from the elements.

Emergency Procedures

Sooner or later your church will have an emergency. Important telephone numbers should be readily available at the information desk. Doctors, nurses, law enforcement officers, and other people usually needed in emergencies should be identified in advance. The most likely emergencies are heart attacks, seizures, accidents, situations with children, and situations where someone may be causing a disturbance. Never panic; always be understanding—but act decisively according to a predetermined strategy.

Telephone and Message Service

Some people are able to attend services when they are on twenty-four-hour call as long as they are promptly notified about incoming messages. This alone is a good reason to have a phone at the information desk. Others, though not on call, may also need to be informed about incoming messages.

Work out a plan for expediting these messages, and make sure the plan is understood by all greeters and ushers.

Lost and Found

If all the Bibles left in churches over the course of a year were stacked in a pile, the sight would be impressive. And a similar pile could be made of gloves and mittens in churches located in cold climates. Because churches are often reluctant to throw away anything people have left behind, what to do with lost and found items can become a problem. At the least, a single place needs to be identified where lost articles are kept—with one person in charge. In addition, at least once a year an announcement should be made, asking people to identify Bibles and other lost belongings before these items are given to a charitable agency. Nothing needs to be kept forever—not even a lost Bible.

Cards, Pencils, and Last Week's Bulletin

There are some things—even though people seldom request them—that are still important to stock in the user-friendly foyer. When a rare situation does arise, it is satisfying to have the answer or have the much needed item available. This kind of service is equal to going the second mile. For instance, someone will surely need last week's bulletin, a copy of the sermon tape from last month, or the address of a missionary. A few plastic head coverings for women who are ready to head out in the rain are only needed when they are really needed. And pencils and pledge cards should always be available, even if just for writing messages to be left at the information desk. Your ingenuity and creativity must be counted on for supplying all the little things people occasionally need.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is your ideal picture of a friendly foyer, and how well does your church foyer measure up?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = couldn't be worse; 10 = couldn't be better), how well do the bulletin boards serve the people in your church? What could improve them?
3. How well is your church progressing toward the ultimate strategy of a user-friendly church where everyone is a greeter?
4. What are the two "Cs" that relate to the effectiveness of your church foyer? How is your church doing with regard to these?
5. How effective are your information-desk and sanctified book-table operations? What are some things you might do to improve these?

FOUR

A Better Way of Doing Things

Once in a long span of years someone comes along with a new idea whose time has come—or with an old idea improved and repackaged for the next generation. Such was the late Sam Walton from Bentonville, Arkansas. Like Henry Ford, who transformed America's idea of transportation by providing the working man with an affordable automobile, Sam Walton transformed the shopping habits of ordinary people in small communities with his new discount stores on the edge of town. He did it with a three-point strategy: (1) quality merchandise at a reduced price; (2) oceans of convenient, free parking; and (3) friendliness unlimited.

No one ever entered a Wal-Mart without being met by a smiling greeter with a down-home welcome. As he visited his stores, Sam Walton led his “associates” in the Sam Pledge: “From this day forward, every customer who comes within ten feet of me, regardless of what I am doing in this place, I am going to look him in the eye. I am going to smile. I am going to greet him with a ‘Good morning,’ or a ‘Good afternoon,’ or a ‘What can I do for you?’—so help me, Sam!”

After twenty-eight years of commitment to good value, ample parking, and unlimited friendliness, it's no wonder that Sam Walton, when he died at seventy-four years of age, was the world's best known pickup truck driver who owned 1,750 stores and whose company surpassed Sears as the number-one retailer in America. At least one-third of his formula focused on friendliness. Surely there must be a lesson here for churches and church greeters.

The evangelist Dwight L. Moody had the friendliness formula in his mind when he built the world's largest Sunday school in Chicago, Illinois, in the late 1850s. He also had a three-point formula: (1) cater to the street children and poor families that other Chicago churches ignored, (2) teach children the gospel by teaching them to sing choruses and gospel songs, and (3) practice unlimited friendliness. Of course, he had greeters at his church

doors. They were there as Moody's personal representatives, passing out love and friendship in the name and for the sake of Christ.

One cold January Sunday morning, when the frigid air came in off Lake Michigan with a fury only Chicagoans can understand, a shivering boy arrived late for Sunday school. He was dressed in an inadequate jacket held together at the neck with a safety pin. Short pants left his thin legs unprotected against the unrelenting cold. His low-cut, hand-me-down shoes were no match for the deep snow. His legs were blue from the chill.

A church greeter picked up the small boy in his big, loving arms and began to massage his legs and arms to get the blood flowing faster. After a big hug, he placed the boy down at arm's length and said, "Where do you live, Sonny?"

When the boy told the greeter his address, the man quickly calculated that the youngster had walked nearly two miles one-way in the bitter cold to attend Moody's Sunday school. "Why did you do it?" he asked. "You must have walked by a dozen church doors to come to Moody's Sunday school! Why did you do it?"

The boy's jaw went slack. He was a child with no ready answer. Then he looked up at the greeter and said carefully, "I guess it's 'cause they love a feller over here."

It is not possible to fake Moody's kind of love. Either you have a loving church, or you don't. Moody once said he wished he could stand on the roof of his church and cry out to all of Chicago, "God loves you!" And somehow, when Moody said it, they believed him.

This chapter is dedicated to better ways of doing things and to the church greeters who are on the front line, declaring what their whole church feels: "We love you, and we're glad you're here."

[TIPS FOR CHURCHES AND THEIR GREETERS](#)

Here are some crucial ideas that can prove to be valuable for you and your church as you carry out your ministry of greeting:

A Spiritual Commitment to the Ministry of Greeting

Paul provides greeters with the proper perspective on their motivation for serving at the door of the church: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you will know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23–24).

Learn to think *kindness*, and not to expect very much in return. Teens may barely look at you, never meeting your eyes with theirs. Mothers with children may be preoccupied with getting themselves and their brood into the church building without one of the youngsters falling down or disappearing into the crowd. There may be reasons why a handshake is ignored by some people or limply returned by others. But keep on being kind and friendly anyway; you are serving the Lord. You are called to be faithful, not to be appreciated.

Concentrating on People, One at a Time

It is human to let everything someone says remind you of something about yourself, thus shifting the conversation from focusing on them to centering on you. This is, however, a serious error in the etiquette of church greeters. Look people in the eyes. And above all, keep smiling and keep talking about them. In a 1961 speech, Adlai Stevenson, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, said, “Flattery is all right—if you don’t inhale.” No one will be upset because you say something nice about them in your greeting at the church door. But always talk about *them*, not about yourself.

Concerning Yourself

As I wrote in *Serving as a Church Usher*, “Self-centered conceit is repulsive, but self-assurance and self-respect are admired.” Be sensitive to your own personal cleanliness and good grooming habits. Wear clothes that say, “I care about how I look.” Deodorant and mouthwash are the friends of greeters.

Be proud to be a greeter. Be affirming in the things you say about your church and your pastor. There is no place for a judgmental attitude at the door of the church. Your face should be pleasant and your attitude

prayerful. Make of yourself the kind of person you'd like to meet if you were entering through your church door each Sunday.

Knowing Your Church

No one can know everything about her or his local church. But with a little effort it shouldn't be hard to make a list of the questions asked most often. And when there is no immediate answer, be ready to refer people to the right source—and then follow up to be sure that their question was answered. There is no reason to be lacking information about offices, telephones, rest rooms, classrooms, exits, nursery facilities, literature, brochures, the church calendar, last week's bulletin, and the like.

Remembering Names

Some persons are more gifted than others in remembering names. However, the greeter who knows the most names is likely to be the most appreciated. Here are some suggestions:

- ❑ Listen to a name until you've accurately understood it, even if you need to ask for the name to be spelled out. Many people don't remember names because they don't listen, and therefore they don't enter the name clearly into the computer of their minds.
- ❑ As much as possible, relate the name to something that is already easily remembered, such as another person by the same name or a well-known place. Most specialists in name-recall emphasize the importance of relating the name to some easily remembered person, place, or thing.
- ❑ Use the person's name at least three times as soon as possible. Start by calling the person by name already as you are in the process of meeting him or her.
- ❑ Write down the name. One traveling minister, famous for remembering many names in many places, always wrote down the name of a new acquaintance as soon as he was alone. He credited his immediate use of the name and his habit of writing it down as the most important factors in his ability to remember names.

Building an Informal Organization

The human tendency is to organize greeters either too much or too little. In many churches, there is one person in charge of the team of greeters, assisted by two captains who recruit and schedule the greeters on a rotating monthly basis. The job of the captain is to walk the hallways to ensure that every church entrance is well served. The job of the head greeter is to ensure that everything runs smoothly, to preside over periodic meetings of all greeters, and to work with the captains on recruiting personnel. In most churches ushers take over where greeters leave off—escorting people to their seats.

In summary, keep the organization simple. Develop the system to fit the size and nature of your church. Every church needs a head greeter who is appointed by the pastor or the board. This assignment may be given to a couple or to one person. The one who is appointed is in charge. He or she provides the necessary training for greeters, holds periodic meetings, gives general supervision to the greeting ministry, and is responsible for the smooth operation of the user-friendly foyer. The job description for the captains, or associate head greeters, may vary according to the size of the church. In small churches, their main responsibility is to recruit greeters and be sure these greeters are in their places for each service. In large churches, there may be a division of labor between the parking lot, the church foyer, and the secondary entrances. In some churches, the greeters are recruited to serve alternate months, thereby using more volunteers and lowering the risk of overload or job weariness.

Regardless of the organizational pattern adopted, the basic rule is to *keep it simple*. It is much better to have too little organization and too little supervision than too much. After all, it is possible to organize a ministry to death.

Dealing with Disruptions

Invariably, things happen that are not in the schedule—unplanned and unanticipated. In these instances, the common sense of the greeter takes over as a quiet, dignified response is made that does not further disrupt things. The presence of social protestors is a reality in our culture. Drugs abound. Alcoholics sometimes go to church. Mentally disturbed persons

may gravitate toward the church, looking for acceptance or for a place to freely express themselves. Whatever the cause of a disturbance, there is no place for panic among greeters. And the best insurance against panic is a predetermined strategy. (See “Emergency Procedures” on page 52.)

The Importance of a Few Good Policies and Procedures

Because the apostle Paul taught us that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6), no group of greeters needs a long list of negatives that spell out rules for greeters. However, policies on such basic matters as what time to arrive, how best to rotate greeters and assignments, what to do when absences are required, and where to receive bulletins and other supplies can enhance the work of the team. And remember, policies are most useful when they are written down.

Four Biblical Qualities of Good Greeters

Those who were appointed to wait on tables in the Jerusalem church qualified by meeting four criteria: (1) a good reputation, (2) life in the Spirit, (3) wisdom, and (4) faith (see Acts 6:1–7). **Note:** This passage provides a good basis for a greeters’ devotional at the opening of a training session.

Four Mundane Qualities of Good Greeters

The person (or persons) assigned to recruit greeters should keep several things in mind: (1) Include some married couples and some male and female singles in your cadre of greeters. It may surprise (and delight) some people if a mature teenager is included in the roster of greeters. (2) People who make a good appearance enhance the witness for Christ and the church. (3) The twin virtues of a good church greeter are kindness and friendliness. (4) Personal hygiene deserves personal attention.

Proper Introduction Techniques

I know of a church that has a policy declaring that no greeter shall turn away from a new person or family in the parking lot or in the foyer until they have introduced them to someone else. One man once told me he had been introduced nine times before he got into the church from the parking lot.

In this age of emphasis on equality, there are no old rules of etiquette that call for the younger to be introduced to the older, or the person with less status to the person with more status. In the first century, when slaves and owners attended the same house church, the Christian witness proclaimed the equal importance of every person. James exhorted members of the early church in these words: “The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower” (James 1:9–10). Introduce people with a clear enunciation of their name and, if possible, a few words about who they are and what identifying connections they may have in the community.

Three Myths to Dispel

There is a myth that suggests church greeters are not important and may in fact not be needed in small churches where everyone knows everyone else. The fact is that greeters are to the arriving worshiper what the teller is to the bank or the waiter is to the restaurant. The money may be in the vault, the food prepared in the kitchen, and the sermon delivered from the pulpit, but the teller, the waiter, and the church greeter are the first visible contact point, working with the customers as they arrive for the service. And to this point in time no one has projected any satisfactory replacements for those who work directly with people.

There is a second myth that suggests anyone can be a greeter. In reality, however, it takes special skills to be an effective greeter, just as it does to sing in the choir or teach in a classroom. Greeters drive the welcome wagon that connects the pastor with the arriving congregation. The front-door experience of every arriving person or family is a high priority in user-friendly churches.

There is yet a third myth that suggests worshipers don’t care who is at the church door as long as it is open and they receive a bulletin when they walk

into the sanctuary. False. People enjoy seeing the same person—or the same couple—at the same door each week. Some people enter the same door each week just to be greeted by the person they expect to be there. And more than one pastor has received reports of people asking about the absence of a particular greeter on a given Sunday. People are creatures of habit who park in the same places, look for the same greeter at “our” door, sit in the same pew, and are disappointed when a stranger is in the pulpit.

Four “Don’ts” to Remember

In his message on unconditional love in his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul identifies four negatives that apply to all Christians, but especially to church greeters: Don’t be (1) proud, (2) rude, (3) self-seeking, or (4) easily angered (1 Corinthians 13:4–5). There is a reason for this discipline of the soul: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). **Note:** These seed-thoughts may be used in the devotional moments at the beginning of a church greeters’ meeting or training session.

The Big Dividends of Follow-Through

In 1854, Henry David Thoreau said in his book *Walden*, “I have only received one or two letters that were worth the postage.” And he further said, “We hate the kindness we understand.” Thoreau hit an open nerve with all of us. We don’t like phony friendliness or contrived kindness. When expressions of these virtues are affected instead of genuine, they tend to boomerang.

Weekday follow-through by church greeters, though, is disarming. An encouraging note, a friendly phone call, or arrangements to have coffee together with a first-time visitor or with an old-timer struggling with the stressful realities of a tough situation may be your cup of cold water given in Christ’s name.

A Sense of the Fitness of Things

In the end there is no way to cover all the possible situations greeters may encounter. Underlying all the work done by this important unit of workers in the church is the plain matter of common sense—and the fact that effective greeting is more an *attitude* than it is a set of techniques. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul notes that in reality an attitude can never be set by law: “. . . kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23). This means that the church greeter’s “better way of doing things” begins in the heart—the heart cleansed by and filled with the love of Jesus Christ and manifested in genuine expressions of kindness at the church door.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you know friendly service people in local establishments whose story may be an encouragement to your greeters? Share some of those stories with your greeters.
2. What would it look like for you as a greeter to concentrate on both the people you greet and on yourself?
3. Which of the suggestions made in this chapter for improving the ability to remember names could you apply in your life?
4. What strategies can be developed for dealing with church-related disturbances and disruptions?
5. What are the four biblical qualifications for a good church greeter?

FIVE

The Parking Lot Ministry

Although North Americans have enjoyed a long-standing love affair with the automobile, cars have not always enjoyed good press. Former British prime minister Winston Churchill once said, “I have always thought that the substitution of the internal combustion machine for the horse marked a very gloomy milestone in the progress of mankind.” When John Keats wrote his 1958 book on the American automobile, he called it *The Insolent Chariots*.

However, the role of the auto is fundamental in understanding the American scene and the attendance habits of churchgoers. The family car has required basic changes in the way Americans live. For instance, our houses are designed to take care of our cars. Cities are divided by freeways, which have increased deterioration in some sections of town and stimulated growth and development in others. The one unquestioned symbol of the suburbs is not the tract house but the automobile. The number of cars in the driveway often indicates the number of adults living at the home.

As congregations have moved to keep in sync with the housing preferences of their parishioners or to escape the blight of their old neighborhoods on the wrong side of the freeways, they invariably have been faced with tougher and tougher local regulations on adequate parking—including number of spaces as well as landscaping, lighting, and drainage issues.

TIPS FOR CARRYING OUT A PARKING LOT MINISTRY

Most businesses today need to provide space for their customers to park their cars. It's only natural, then, that parking lot duties are included in the responsibilities of greeters in many churches as well. Churchill's longing for the simple ways of the horse are not widely shared. The car is here to stay, and its numbers on the roadways are increasing. In churches with multiple services, some families arrive in more than one car as they struggle

to meet conflicting schedules. The question at hand is this: What are the best ways to include the parking lot in the ministry of church greeters?

The Red Carpet Treatment

One church I visited actually rolled out a red carpet from the front door of the church to the curb where cheerful greeters opened car doors and helped families disembark. The carpet seemed to please everyone—especially the children. And it was a symbol of the importance the church and the greeters attached to the arrival of worshipers. Even without a red carpet, it is still possible to give people the feeling of a red-carpet welcome as they roll up to the church in the family car.

Regulated Parking

Regulated parking is a necessity in most church parking lots in the core city. Small-town and rural churches usually have parking spaces available for their parishioners in their own lot, on the street, and in the lots of adjacent businesses closed on Sundays. Very large churches with newer facilities have found themselves compelled by virtue of building codes to provide comfortable parking lots. The churches with the biggest parking problems are often in places where all parking spots are at a premium because the church and all other properties in the area were built before the updated parking codes went into effect.

It may seem unfair, but members arriving early to worship services may sometimes be asked to park in spots farthest from the church so that convenient spaces can be saved for others. Therefore, choir members, teachers, greeters, staff members, and attendants who arrive early can provide a great service by parking at a distance.

Except for persons using reserved spaces near the building, families need a warmhearted greeter to assist in the parking process. It seems that fewer and fewer churches have the luxury of abundant parking that can be used haphazardly. Therefore, the use of parking lot attendants is crucial in making the best use of the available space. In all cases, an important priority is to train attendants to be church greeters; never reduce their assignment to that of merely directing traffic.

People with Bundles

Many Sunday school volunteers arrive at church burdened down with packages and boxes that can be difficult to handle. The availability of carts or wagons under the command of teenagers is a small but often necessary service to church volunteers.

Multiple Services

Two and three services on a Sunday morning can both alleviate and complicate the challenge of parking for everyone. Properly marked lanes for entering and exiting the lot are mandatory. Ample time between services for clearing and refilling the parking lot is essential. And in almost every case a multiple schedule requires gracious and efficient men and women to supervise the process.

Multiple Parking Lots

Some large churches that occupy older properties solve the challenge of ample parking by using multiple lots on opposite sides of the church—sometimes across the street or around the corner. This parking pattern calls for a supervisor and cadre of greeters in each lot, because separate areas must be operated on their own. If a street crossing is involved, safety becomes a factor, and additional trained personnel will be needed. Some churches use auxiliary business or school parking at considerable distances from the church. The churches that have this arrangement often request their own members to fill up the auxiliary parking areas first, thereby saving the adjacent lots for visitors and latecomers. In these situations, shuttle buses or vans are used to bring people from the farthest parking areas to the church doors.

Each escalation in the complexity of the parking situation further confuses the matter and calls for more and better planning and supervision. In any case, protect your congregation from individuals with a parking lot-attendant mentality—people who resort to ordering and monitoring. Help everyone in the parking lot to see themselves as church greeters with all of the qualifications required of greeters at the foyer doors.

Valet Parking

I know of churches that provide valet parking for individuals with physical infirmities and for elderly individuals. However, bear in mind that this service can open you up to the possibility of liability; therefore you'll want to be sure to plan and monitor this service carefully, as well as make sure that your liability insurance is ample and up-to-date. Everyone's personality changes when his or her car is damaged.

Shuttle Service

Golf carts, vans, and specialty vehicles are of great service in situations such as downhill parking. One church I visited used special vehicles that looked like old-fashioned street cars to bring people from the bottom of the hill where much of the church parking was located. The more unique the vehicle, the better the people—especially the children—will adjust to the commuting process. But regardless of the uniqueness of the vehicle, efficiency is the key to making a shuttle service work. A shuttle bus or train needs to be in sight the moment a family gets out of their car. Also, small station houses that are attractive and conveniently located may increase the popularity of a shuttle service.

ONE MAN'S MINISTRY

A wonderful layperson in a large church in Detroit, Michigan, adopted the parking lot of his church as a ministry. Because there weren't enough parking spaces to meet the needs of the congregation at the time, he figured out a way to park the cars in a solid mass—just like the downtown commercial parking lots did. To do so meant he had to be on hand early, along with his carefully chosen and personally trained workers. The system worked because they figured out a way to empty the lot without everyone leaving at the same moment. The procedure was effective, although it took a considerable amount of focused attention—both before and after church.

One Sunday a husband and his wife wheeled into the church parking lot, intending to turn around. Before they could execute their turn, another car

wheeled in behind them, and then another and another—and they were stuck.

The unsuspecting visitor explained to the parking attendant his intention to turn around and the fact that now he was stuck and didn't know what to do. Rather than unravel the entire parking lot to let out this one car, the supervisor talked this couple into staying for church. And they did. To everyone's surprise, they liked the service. They enjoyed the pastor, and they particularly enjoyed the congregational singing. On their way out, they even commented about the gracious and positive attitudes of the people. The person who saw his parking lot assignment as a ministry was thrilled. As the visitors drove away, he waved a happy good-bye, never expecting to see them again. However, the next Sunday they intentionally came back to worship. Other Sundays followed, with the lay minister taking every opportunity before and after church to reinforce his growing friendship with the couple. Today, that once-upon-a-time-stranger who entered the parking lot by mistake is serving on the church board.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How many parking spaces do you have for your church, and how well do the number of spaces match the number of cars needed for your people on Sunday morning?
2. What specific things could you do to make your parking lot a more beautiful place—a place that can serve as an extension of your sanctuary?
3. What services could you add in your parking lot that would enhance the Sunday morning experience of your congregation?
4. What is the current level of happiness with your parking facilities as they are, and what could you do to improve things without spending major amounts of dollars?
5. Do you have adequate supervision in your parking lot? Do your volunteers see themselves as greeters and not just traffic directors? What could you do to increase their love for the greeting ministry?

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