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# A Simple Cup of Coffee: What Starbucks Can Teach the Church About Hospitality In How We Reach Our Neighbors

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A SIMPLE CUP OF COFFEE:  
WHAT STARBUCKS CAN TEACH THE CHURCH ABOUT HOSPITALITY  
IN HOW WE REACH OUR NEIGHBORS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 2, 2015  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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To Leila B. and to Tripp,

I am the man that I am because of both of you.

“For all the promise of digital media to bring people together, I still believe that the most sincere, lasting powers of human connection come from looking directly into someone else’s eyes, with no screen in between.”

Howard Schultz – *Onward*

“Starbucks knows that people live for engagement, connection, symbols, and meaningful experiences. If you read the Bible, you’ll see that the people of God throughout history have known the same thing. Life at its very best is a passionate experience, not a doctoral dissertation.”

Leonard Sweet – *The Gospel According to Starbucks*

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores a local church's implementation of Christian hospitality through the examination of a local Starbucks coffee house that successfully offers hospitality to its customers both in and outside its community. A critical problem facing mainline churches today is a decline in overall membership and worship participation. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has experienced a significant decline over the last 40 years. This decline is now being experienced even in larger evangelical churches. In this dissertation the researcher plans to explore whether a local Presbyterian Church can more effectively reach out to its neighboring community by renewing and implementing outward acts of Christian hospitality while adopting the practices of a Starbucks coffee house. Section One will address the problem with Christian hospitality that is focused inwardly towards those within the church. Section Two identifies and evaluates alternative solutions to the ministry problem of hospitality. Section Three explores hospitality as implemented by a local Starbucks coffee house using "Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service" and the possible benefits for the local church in implementing "The Four Pillars" as a form of outward Christian hospitality. Section Four is an artifact description of a fictional novel meant to offer the local church a practical application to hospitality using tools employed by Starbucks through "The Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service." The final section offers the artifact specification. The artifact concludes the dissertation.

## SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

### **Introduction**

A young couple awoke one Sunday morning and decided that this was the day to try a new church. Both husband and wife were baptized in the Christian faith. The wife was active in her church's youth group growing up. The husband's family attended church on Easter and Christmas only. They even got married in her childhood church, but after that day and before this day, they thought they had no reason to go back. They worked hard on the weekdays and they loved to sleep in and play on the weekends, but with the birth of their daughter, now thirteen months old, they came to the conclusion that they wanted more for their child than what life without a faith tradition seemed to offer.

They decided to visit the Presbyterian Church in town, in part because the wife's family was Presbyterians for generations, but mostly because they had often admired the beautiful exterior and stained glass as they passed by the sanctuary going to work. Running late that Sunday morning, the young couple had to figure out where to park since the church was located downtown and there were few parking spaces close to the church. Once they parked, they rushed towards what they thought was the sanctuary with no signage pointing the way. Unable to get through a few locked doors, and having to re-navigate, they finally entered the sanctuary.

The ushers were nice enough, showing the young couple where to sit, but no one told them about the nursery for their daughter. Sitting in a sea of gray hair it was clear that this particular congregation was aging quickly. When worship was over, people smiled, and they felt sure the pastor would have shaken their hands had they waited in the

line to talk with him. However, no other parishioners introduced themselves. No one said, “Welcome” or “Please come back.”

After church, the couple decided to go “their” Starbucks. The minute they walked into the coffee house the barista warmly said, “Welcome Johnson family. Two Latte Grandes?”

### **Twentieth-Century Decline and Continued Free Fall**

From the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and through the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mainline denominations in the United States have witnessed both a constant free fall in membership and an eroding influence in the local community. Even denominations that once prided themselves in growth, both in membership and baptism, have awakened to this new reality.<sup>1</sup> For years denominational leaders have attempted to address this waning influence by establishing lofty goals for new church plants or imposing unrealistic, evangelical church membership drives, both with little success in the longer term. Once-thriving congregations now find themselves struggling to move forward in all aspects of church life as they try to minister to their local communities in the same way they always have. Instead of “pouring new wine in new wine skins,” many churches lament the passing of a golden age and speak openly about wanting to go back to a time of prosperity. Yet, this sentiment seems to detach the church and its members even further

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<sup>1</sup> Yasmine Hafiz, “Southern Baptist Convention Membership Declined For Seventh Year,” *The Huffington Post*, May 29, 2014, accessed June 5, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/29/southern-baptist-convention-membership-decline\\_n\\_5411695.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/29/southern-baptist-convention-membership-decline_n_5411695.html)

from their local communities, creating the image of a walled fortress trying to prevent the overcoming sea of change.<sup>2</sup>

Reggie McNeal points out that this detachment from local communities reinforces the notion to those outside the church that “Religious people don’t see people; they see causes, behaviors, stereotypes, people ‘other’ than them.”<sup>3</sup> McNeal further argues that people outside the church are no longer obligated to connect to a church for social or commercial reasons, nor are they attracted to a local congregation because of denominational branding. Instead of looking for Methodist or Lutheran congregations, those outside the church, if curious at all, are interested in finding a place where they are embraced as individuals, whether that is in a church or not.

Michael Spencer agrees with McNeal, claiming that denominational branding no longer resonates with an ever-changing generation that is more likely to relate to “other” than those who are familiar in the local church.<sup>4</sup> Spencer further states this decline and disconnect to community is now being witnessed in the once ever-growing, evangelical, mega-churches that used to boast that this decline was nonexistent in its world. An example of this deterioration and fear of decline is witnessed in the evangelical world through the congregation of the Crystal Cathedral.

Because of the Crystal Cathedral’s recent inner squabbles over leadership, their financial bankruptcy, and the eventual sale of church property, many in the mega-church

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 9:14-17.

<sup>3</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Spencer, “The Coming Evangelical Collapse,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2009, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>.

movement wonder if their churches might someday repeat this story.<sup>5</sup> The sharp decline of the Crystal Cathedral was born out of an ever-aging population, and a drop in revenues with the crash of the housing market in California at the start of 2008. Additionally, the church lacked continual leadership with a vision for reaching out to its changing community. The audience changed, but the message did not. The birthplace of the power of positive thinking found itself with a lack of power and influence within its own community.

Even thriving congregations with “rock star” pastors are vulnerable to similar decline. In the fall of 2009, Rick Warren of Saddleback Church wrote to his congregation pleading with members to make up a financial shortage in the church budget.<sup>6</sup> Though the church quickly recovered from the shortfall, this incident points to the fragility in the fabric of even the mega-church. McNeal reasons that leaders of local churches, both large and small, must therefore separate ‘causes’ from ‘people’, and rediscover or perhaps discover for the first time, that what attracts those outside the church to a particular congregation is its sense of community and welcome.<sup>7</sup>

### **Closer to Home: A Look at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

A simple glance of the membership rolls and financial giving statistics over the past forty years within The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reveals the manifestation of this

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<sup>5</sup> Billy Silverman, “Crystal Cathedral Bankruptcy: Megachurch Files For Chapter 11.” *The Huffington Post*. October 18, 2010, accessed June 5, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/18/crystal-cathedral-bankrup\\_n\\_767219.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/18/crystal-cathedral-bankrup_n_767219.html)

<sup>6</sup> Catey Hill, “Saddleback Church Pastor, ‘The Purpose-Driven Life’s Author Rick Warren, Begg Parishioners for \$900K,” *NY Daily News*, December 31, 2009, accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/money/saddleback-church-pastor-purpose-driven-life-author-rick-warren-begs-parishioners-900k-article-1.434038>

<sup>7</sup> McNeal, *The Present Future*, 52.

free fall for mainline churches. The denomination of the researcher's ordination has experienced a consistent deterioration in membership in most of its congregations. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reported in 2001 a membership of 2,493,781. In 2011, the membership number was 1,952,287. The current membership reflects a net loss of 541,494 members, or approximately 21.7 percent over the last 10 years. Another sign of downsizing is the fact that there were 11,141 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations in 2001, 675 more than reported ten years later in 2011.<sup>8</sup> Similar to The Crystal Cathedral, this decline in numbers for the Presbyterian Church and loss of influence in its community is not just a problem of small, rural congregations.

Presbyterian congregations of historical influence are likewise being affected. The former Dormont Presbyterian Church located in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania had over a thousand members on its church roll in the 1950's, but eventually closed its doors in 2013.<sup>9</sup> The church never recovered from the steady migration of families to the suburbs. The 2014 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) held in Detroit, Michigan in June and received a report showing that this steady decline continues. To make matters worse, internal squabbles over theological issues and ordination standards, have caused many evangelical and conservative churches within The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to have sought and continue seeking dismissal to other reformed denominations.<sup>10</sup> This infighting has resulted in multiple lawsuits and bad press, causing the local church to be further separated from its community. Even with the threat of

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<sup>8</sup> "Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), accessed November 19, 2012, <http://www.pcusa.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Anya Sostek and Michael A. Fuoco, "Dormont Presbyterian Church Closes Its Doors," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 2, 2013, accessed June 6, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie Scanlon, "Who's Joining the Exodus?" *The Presbyterian Outlook*, September 16, 2013, accessed June 5, 2014, <http://pres-outlook.org/2013/09/whos-joining-the-exodus/>

lawsuits or the hefty payoff demanded for leaving the denomination, large, conservative churches within the denomination are calculating the cost and still voting to move or are in the process of leaving. For example in the Spring of 2014, 93 percent of the 4,000 members of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church voted to leave under the obligation to pay the denomination 8.89 million dollars in order to leave with its property.<sup>11</sup>

This is not the first time The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), nor its predecessor denominations of The Presbyterian Church (U.S.) and The United Presbyterian (U.S.A.) have dealt with division and schism. Major denominational splits previously took place in 1972 and again 1983, eroding membership and influence.

Even more powerful than mere numbers is the narrative of how this shrinking reality has impacted the local church and its members. For example, at *The Joyful Approach to Stewardship* workshop hosted by the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee, an 82-year-old, Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shared her story.<sup>12</sup> She has been a member of her particular congregation for over forty years. It was the first church she and her husband visited when they moved to Tennessee from New Jersey. As such, she has witnessed the many transformations of this congregation over the last four decades, from a new church development born out of the baby-boomer generation post World War II, into a thriving congregation with young couples and babies everywhere, to the present. “But,” she said in a matter of fact, yet mournful way, “we woke up one morning and all the people were gone.”

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah P. Baily, “John Ortberg’s Menlo Park Presbyterian Votes to Leave PCUSA despite \$8 Million Fee - Religion News Service,” Religion News Service, March 5, 2014, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/03/05/john-ortbergs-menlo-park-presbyterian-votes-leave-pcusa-despite-8-million-fee/>

<sup>12</sup> Chris Adams, “The Joyful Approach to Stewardship” (lecture, Nashville, TN, September 29, 2012).

In 1983, the elderly woman's congregation had over 400 members on the church roll, with 250 people attending worship on any given Sunday. The church staff included a Senior Pastor, an Associate Pastor, plus a part-time Christian Educator. Thirty years later the church still has close to 400 members on the church roll, but this is because the Session simply has not "cleaned" the church roll in some time. Many still included are the names of children of the church who have grown up and have moved away from the community. Today's reality of that Tennessee church is a congregation that averages just over 100 people in worship, and the only staff currently serving the congregation consists of a secretary and a pastor. Even with the limited staff, the congregation is having difficulty affording the two salaries through the weekly offerings and tithes. A large portion of the church budget is supplemented by money left by members who remembered the church in their wills.

In further conversation, this faithful soul admitted that most of her church's current focus is centered on the conversation of how the church will keep its doors open. *In essence, the church has become its own mission.* This Ruling Elder is generally confounded as to why this uncomfortable transformation has happened to her church. "After all," she said, "we are a friendly and welcoming congregation."

### **Failed Renewal and Evangelical Efforts to Restore Local Church**

Twenty years after its publication, William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas' book, *Resident Aliens*, serves as a prophetic voice to mainline churches in the United States in the face of decreasing membership and influence in the local community. Metaphorically, Willimon describes the exact day he believes that Christendom died in his hometown of Greenville, South Carolina. The Fox Theater had traditionally been



closed on Sundays in observance of the state's Blue Laws. However, in 1963, when the state watered down its Sabbath laws, the theater opened its doors for business on Sundays. The weekend this change took place and the Fox Theater was open for business, Willimon and his friends went to the movies instead of attending their church youth group. Willimon writes,

We in no way mean to imply that, before 1963, things were better for believers. Our point is that, before the Fox Theater opened on Sunday, Christians could deceive themselves into thinking that we were in charge, that we had made a difference, that we had created a Christian culture.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas at one time the local church heavily swayed and influenced the local community, even effecting policy and local governments, Willimon's storied moment puts flesh on the church's waning authority over its community and even over its own membership.

While Willimon's story serves as an expression of how the declining statistics have played out for the local church across the United States, McNeal offers an observation about the fate of many churches that have tried to reverse the overwhelming tide with little or no affect:

Their answer is to live inside the bubble, in a Christian subculture complete with its own entertainment industry. Evangelism in this world-view is about chasing the unchurched, not connecting people to Jesus. It focuses on cleaning up people, changing their behavior so Christians (translation: church people) can be more comfortable around them.<sup>14</sup>

This trend seems to suggest a belief that if the church could simply adopt and duplicate the marketing capability that surrounds the church building, then the message of the

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), Kindle, 16.

<sup>14</sup> McNeal, 9.

church would be more appealing to the local community. Few differences exist in a leadership seminar for business leaders compared to a leadership conference for ministers and laypeople. Yet this adaptation model, produced by marketing firms and publishing houses, fails to point out to the community why the church is important to the world.

Carl Medearis, author and lecturer, has spent years trying to bridge the gap between the Christian and Muslim communities. He stresses this point by speaking about the need for Christians to form meaningful bonds with their Muslim neighbors, “We [believers] are a witness and point to what we know to be true. It is not a matter if the harvest is ready. Jesus said the harvest is ready. The question we must answer is are *we* ready?”<sup>15</sup> Medearis emphasizes the point that what “sells” the church to the community is not the church’s program or plans. Instead, what the community wants to see is *who* the church is following.

Hauerwas and Willimon share Medearis’s opinion of the need to refocus the church away from failed forms of evangelism towards offering the community something that is uniquely found in the church. “What we are saying is that in the twilight of that world, we have an opportunity to discover what has and always is the case—that the church, as those called out by God, embodies a social alternative that the world cannot on its own terms know.”<sup>16</sup> This paradigm shift moves the church away from an “us” versus “them” approach of evangelism where the church has convinced itself of its importance in the world. Rather, the church is now called to reach out to its community, focusing on how the church can serve those within the community.

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<sup>15</sup> Carl Medearis, “Speaking Jesus.” Lecture, Connecting Mission Leadership Conference (First Presbyterian Church, San Antonio, TX, September 19, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, 17, 18.

An even harder shift the church must make is to move away from worrying about replacing former church members on an ever-declining church roll. In contrast, this new approach to outreach—as a moment of renewal—dictates whether the local church lives or dies. According to Hauerwas and Willimon, the local church has the opportunity to offer the public a ministry that is uniquely “church,” but resonates with those in the community. Robert Schnase, a bishop in the United Methodist Church, fleshes out this paradigm shift further by describing it as,

a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates church members to openness and adaptability, a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of newcomers.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, this new form of outreach only happens when the members of the local congregation leave the security of their church sanctuary and live out the great commission as living witnesses to Divine Truth. Schnase points out that witnessing to the local community forces the church to see that its greatest testimony is not some predetermined diatribe, but instead, is how the church and its members welcome and embrace those God puts before them.

### **Failed View of John Calvin’s Understanding of the Visible and Invisible Church**

As the decline of the mainline and evangelical churches continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and more churches revert, as already described by McNeal, into their “bubbles,” fewer churches fail to engage the invisible church that is found beyond the church walls. John Calvin in his fourth book of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, explores the understanding of both the visible (as seen through the signs and symbols of the faith) and

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<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). Kindle, 11.

invisible church (can only be fully made known by God). John Leith, former professor of Christian Theology at Union Theological Seminary, further explains the divinely mysterious relationship of the visible and the invisible church as, “The visible being of the church witnessing to its invisibility. The problem with invisibility is based in the inability of any human being to set the boundaries of the church or grasp the reality that is known only to God.”<sup>18</sup>

In this season of decline, the mistake many churches make because of the “us” verses “them” approach of evangelism is to deny the existence of the invisible church in the community. It is to deny that God is actually working in and through the community. Doing so only creates “the church against the world” mentality in many of its members, further denying God being at work in the world in the first place.

This thinking is seen in the evangelical model of church outreach in the notion that somehow the church is called to take “Jesus into the world,” thus rejecting the idea that Jesus is already in the world working among the lives of those in the community. Yet, in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin claims, “IV.i.2 - The church is called ‘catholic’ or ‘universal’ because there could not be two or three churches, unless Christ be torn asunder.”<sup>19</sup> Calvin’s reference to the church as “catholic” is a reflection of separation and unity within the Body of Christ, but also acknowledges the presence of the invisible church found beyond the church doors. It is for this reason that Leith forcefully

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<sup>18</sup> John H. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being the Christian Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 149.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Calvin’s Institutes: A New Compend*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 130.

argues, “The church as an affirmation of faith does not lead to a depreciation of the church that is accessible to ordinary knowledge.”<sup>20</sup>

Christ’s followers cannot be the visible church and deny God’s work within the invisible church; therefore, one of the signs and symbols of the visible church is to openly confess that God is at work within and through that which is hidden from the eyes of the believer. God is at work beyond the church doors. Leith summarizes this thought by pointing out, “The distinction which Calvin makes between the visible and invisible church does not mean that there are two churches, one in which Christ truly reigns and another in which Christ shares his sovereignty with the forces of evil. There is only one church, and this church Christ alone rules.”<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, in recognizing the invisible church as part of the ‘catholic’ church, the visible church cannot make the mistake of thinking that its mission and calling is to straighten out the invisible church. For this reason, McNeal says that too often the visible church leans towards “cleaning up people, changing their behavior so Christians (translation: church people) can be more comfortable around them.”

In contrast to cleaning up people, Shirley Guthrie, former professor of Reformed Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary, rightly observes, “Our understanding of our task changes completely when we are modest enough to acknowledge that we Christians and our church are neither required nor allowed to think that we have to be the saviors of men or the rulers of the world.”<sup>22</sup> Salvation is found in Jesus Christ and Jesus

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<sup>20</sup> Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, 149.

<sup>21</sup> John H. Leith, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 175.

<sup>22</sup> Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), 372.

Christ alone. The church (visible) is simply called to be a reflection of the salvation found in Jesus within and outside the church walls, further reminding the visible church that it cannot live life in its bubble. As a matter of fact, the visible church should find relief that it is free from the burden of salvation. Guthrie further states,

Just when we remember our own gospel about what God has done on Good Friday and Easter and still doing in Christ “between the times”; just when we are willing to let him be Savior and Lord—then our task becomes an unbelievably confident, even carefree, enterprise. Jesus Christ is the world’s Lord and Savior! The world already belongs to him!<sup>23</sup>

Freed from the burden of salvation, the visible church is called to simply see its obligation to the invisible church as one of hospitable relations, thus popping the bubble where it hides. The call of the visible church is to live as neighbors, to build relations with those in the invisible church. Leith reflects on neighboring by pointing out, “People are neighbors by the fact of creation... God has bound and united all people in one body in order that each one will be careful to serve his or her neighbor and maintain that community and sense of justice which does to others only what one wishes to do be done to oneself.”<sup>24</sup>

### **An Inward Focus of Understanding of the Ministry of Christian Hospitality**

Most congregations can argue that the one thing they get right is that their particular church practices Christian hospitality in some form or fashion. Even in light of this claim, Christine Pohl, professor of Church and Society/ Christian Ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary, cautions the church: “In any case, today most understandings of hospitality have a minimal moral component—hospitality is a nice extra if we have the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Leith, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 184.

time or the resources, but we rarely view it as a spiritual obligation or as a dynamic expression of vibrant Christianity.”<sup>25</sup> Too many churches see hospitality as a practice that focuses inwardly to meet the distinctive needs of its members. Focusing inwardly, many churches exclusively describe hospitality in connection with Family Night Suppers, Women’s Circles or providing food for the sick and the shut-ins of the church.

Even if the church desires to move away from inward centered forms of hospitality, Pohl argues that reclaiming the ministry of hospitality that looks outward must not be seen by the church as simply blowing off the dust of some well used, mass marketed, evangelism program with ten easy steps to reach a church’s true potential. For example, delivering meals to a church member in need or even “home group” ministries found in evangelical churches appear to be forms of hospitality. However, to those outside the church these ministries alone are viewed as the church looking inwardly. Being overly focused on the needs of the individual members make a local church’s shift in view of the ministry of hospitality outward beyond the church walls even more difficult. Elizabeth Newman, faculty member of Baptist Theological Seminary, cautions that these particular inward acts of hospitality can quickly become “the sentimental baggage” of past Christian practices thus, making it difficult or almost impossible for a particular congregation to give up or alter these practices.<sup>26</sup> Resistance to change is often found within the local church membership when an alternate outward focused view of

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<sup>25</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), Kindle, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), Kindle, 22.

hospitality is offered. This resistance stems from fear that somehow the pastoral needs of the individual member will no longer be met.

Yet as Newman insists, it is only through the outward focus of Christian hospitality that the local church will be able to regain the gospel belief that God's transforming grace is still at work in the world, even if the world is not fully aware of this divine grace. Amy Oden, Professor of Early Church History and Spirituality, Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University, asserts that when the church lives out

salvation in gospel hospitality, we are not giving people something they don't have. We have no property right to the welcome table; it belongs to God. We are only pointing out God's saving welcome, paying attention to it, and giving glory to God for it. Since God is already at work in all things, God has already been at work in the experience people bring with them, even if deeply buried.<sup>27</sup>

The ministry of outward Christian hospitality has to become part of the DNA of the very fabric of the church and the story shares with its community. Oden further argues,

At best, evangelism is living out and sharing the good news of God's welcome so naturally and deeply that others claim the good news of God's welcome in their own lives, too. The good news is real and compelling when it comes from truth of our lives, not when it is a set of right words.<sup>28</sup>

As outward hospitality becomes more and more the story of the church, these moments of hospitality begin to happen naturally; likewise, the local church and its members will come to understand that each day provides an opportunity to experience the extraordinary. Expression of outward hospitality is witnessed not only in the verbal message of the church, but more importantly in the living, external appearance and activity of church members. The Reverend Chris Adams puts forth that living an

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<sup>27</sup> Amy Oden, *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-hungry World* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 103,104.

<sup>28</sup> Oden, *God's Welcome*, 112.



invitational life has nothing to do with inviting neighbors to church, but in “living invitational lives” wherein our neighbors become curious about why we go to church.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the conversation continues which may or may not lead one to the church, but it does allow an individual to know that if one comes to church he or she will be welcomed.

### **The Implied Challenges**

As pointed out by Hauerwas and Willimon in *Resident Aliens*, the local church and its members face an ever-changing shift in cultural context. The local community is challenging long-held beliefs within the church. Because of these challenges, many congregations struggle with when and how to take the next step towards an uncertain future where there are no guarantees of success. Like the example offered by the 82 year-old Ruling Elder at The Joyful Approach to Stewardship workshop, many local churches and their members are simply trying to survive. They are simply trying to keep the doors of the church open from one Sunday to the next. Living primarily in survival mode, these churches are hesitant or uninformed about how to live out the ministry of outward Christian hospitality on the following three fronts: 1. old traditions of hospitality have to die or be put aside; 2. the ministry of outward hospitality takes time; 3. the ministry of hospitality actually works by bringing in strangers into the worshiping life of the congregation.

First, in order to live outward Christian hospitality, and thus begin the renewal of the church, old traditions of hospitality have to die or be put aside for the sake of the local community. By doing so, the church becomes freed from focusing merely on what it

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<sup>29</sup> The Reverend Chris Adams was the lead lecturer at The Joyful Approach to Stewardship workshop in the fall of October 2013 for The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee.

“gets” when living out hospitality to what it “gives” to its community. Daniel Homan writes, “It takes a strong person to give (himself) away.”<sup>30</sup> The church does not live out the ministry of hospitality to simply add new church members. The church lives out the ministry of hospitality to share Jesus.

Second, as pointed out by Oden, the ministry of outward hospitality takes time, effort and prayer. Living out hospitably is difficult in and of itself; but it is made even more problematic when individually, the members of the local church face so many demands both in and outside the church. Pohl puts it like this:

Hospitality is difficult today because of our overwhelming busyness. With already overburdened and tightly constrained schedules, trying to offer substantial hospitality can drive us to despair. Most of us have significant responsibilities; hospitality cannot simply be added onto already impossible agendas. To offer hospitality we will need to rethink and reshape our priorities.<sup>31</sup>

The local church and its members must understand that outward Christian hospitality is not a part-time activity, but must be lived out of the abundant blessings bestowed upon us through our relationship with Jesus Christ. A church cannot ‘date’ outward hospitality as a ministry. Rather, the church has to be ‘married’ to outward hospitality. It is a full commitment to this life and ministry of the church. This point is reinforced as Newman quotes Jean Vanier, theologian and founder of L’Arche, an international ministry for people with developmental disabilities: “Generosity consists in doing good to others, in giving our time or money, in devoting ourselves to others and to their good.” Vanier goes

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<sup>30</sup> Homan, Daniel, and Lonni Collins Pratt. *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love*. (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2002), 58.

<sup>31</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, 171.

on to say, “Generous people are in a strong position: they have talents, power and wealth; they do good things for others but do not receive from them.”<sup>32</sup>

The third challenge for the local church and its members comes when the ministry of hospitality actually works by bringing in strangers into the worshiping life of the congregation. Pohl writes, “When hospitality is a way of life, the strangers and guests we welcome seem to become increasingly diverse.”<sup>33</sup> Diversity means new people, new ideas, and new opinions and thus an influx of new people means change for the local church, and this change can be scary. However, Newman reminds the local church that, “strangers might generate fear in us is a possibility we all face, and certainly we are to be wise and discerning in the ways we relate to and welcome strangers. Yet Christians’ lives are to be determined by our loves rather than our fears.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 180.

<sup>33</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, 103.

<sup>34</sup> Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 139.

## SECTION 2: OTHER SOLUTIONS

### Introduction

Mainline and evangelical churches experienced a steep decline in membership at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This sharp decline led to diminishing influence within their local communities and has forced them to explore ways to renew the faithful church goer while simultaneously increasing their church rolls and service. Exploring past efforts into correcting this ecclesiastical problem and generating possible solutions better equips the church to build upon, discard, or come up with new responses to this present challenge. It is also important to note that what worked yesterday for the church might not work today, let alone produce the same outcomes within and outside the church. Andy Stanley, the Lead Pastor for the North Point Church in Atlanta, reminds the local church,

Every innovation has an expiration date. At some point, new isn't new anymore, regardless of what the package says. Eventually, new ideas feel like yesterday's news. Bread is not the only thing that gets stale over time. Every new and innovative approach to ministry has an expiration date as well. Every single one. Nothing is irresistible or relevant forever.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing that innovation comes and goes, followed by new thoughts and ideas or laying claim to old truths rediscovered, gives the local church and the individual believer the freedom and the permission to constantly analyze how to reach the community that surrounds the church. Paying attention to one's own experience in how God is moving enables the establishment of a strong foundation to define possibilities. This openness lays claim to McNeal's assertion, "I am a disciple of Jesus. I am serving him by serving

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle, loc. 3114-3117.

you, because that's what he came to do."<sup>2</sup> The exploration of the past enlightens the church experience as the local church moves towards the future.

According to futurist Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, "The challenge is not just to make the church effective in its own life and witness, but to do so in such a way that the core interaction with the culture is change."<sup>3</sup> Each approach seeks this engagement with its culture and community. The hope is to discover a radical approach to what has become a daily problem for the local church.

'Radical,' as defined by Robert Schnase means, "arising from the source" and describes practices that are rooted in the life of Christ and that radiate into the lives of others. Radical means "drastically different from ordinary practice, outside the normal," and so it provokes practices that exceed expectations, that go the second mile, that take welcoming the stranger to the max."<sup>4</sup> Much like the radical nature of God's grace, exploring radical approaches of outreach gives the local church a possible path forward in these uncharted waters of reaching out to its community. Other possible solutions to the problem of decline and influence of the church in its community are an anti-capitalistic approach, political engagement, church structure and purpose, and finally, individual and corporate evangelism.

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<sup>2</sup> McNeal, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2003), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Schnase, 20, 21.

### The Anti-Capitalistic Approach

Max Weber, a German sociologist and political economist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, explores the so-called protestant work ethic and its influence in the life of the church. In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber points out the possible corruption capitalism might play in the life of the church, thus diluting the power of the church itself. While Weber approaches the conflict between capitalism and church scientifically and without judgment, his work serves as a warning against the influences of capitalism as method of evangelical outreach; should the church have a difficulty distinguishing between the two.

Weber defines capitalism as involving the exchange of goods and calculations of profit verses loss in terms of money, citing that this way of life has existed in civilization in all corners of the globe, from ancient times to the present.<sup>5</sup> The definition in and of itself does not point to a conflict in the way a congregation functions internally or in the way it chooses to reach out to its community. However, at the very least, this definition may point to an indifference toward capitalistic ideals and the impact such indifference may have on the Gospel message: where one has nothing to do with the other. As a matter of fact, according to Weber, for the church, “adventure capitalism did not imply an ethical affirmation and shaping of this new situation. Rather, the intrusion of an unrestrained quest for gain was only *tolerated* as a new reality; it was treated with ethical indifference or as a disagreeable but unavoidable presence.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Pub., 2012), xvii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

This reality implies possibly more than just mere indifference in relation to the ideals of capitalism and the Christian message. More alarming is the very real possibility of the corruption that capitalism may bring about in the life of the church. Thus, the danger of the church applying lessons learned through a capitalistic endeavor opens the way for potential perversion in reaching out to its neighbors in the first place. These efforts, shaped by capitalism, define the community simply as potential givers to the church coffers; a sharp contrast to lost sheep.

Weber is more forceful in his assumption when he further states that capitalism, like Christianity, is no less a ‘calling,’ and often the callings of capitalism and Christianity are mutually exclusive from each other.<sup>7</sup> This observation resonates with the eventual tension and possible demise when one tries to serve two masters.<sup>8</sup> Weber further argues,

The capitalistic economic order, it could be argued, needs this devotion to a “calling” of moneymaking. This devotion could then be seen as a type of behavior, in respect to external consumer goods, closely tied to this economic structure and the conditions of the capitalist order’s victory in the earlier economic struggle of existence, indeed to such an extent that any necessary connection between this “acquisitive” manner of organizing life and a unified “worldview” of any sort must be entirely rejected today.<sup>9</sup>

This thought indicates that the church finds itself in grave danger when the community it is serving cannot tell the difference between its message and the overall influence of a capitalistic society. According to Weber, “It could be argued, that it is no longer necessary for this organization of life to be supported by this approval of any religious

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<sup>7</sup> Calling according to Weber is the core purpose of any given institution.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 6:24.

<sup>9</sup>Weber, 32.

authority figures. Moreover, the influence of the norms of the church upon economic life, to the extent that they are still perceptible at all, could be viewed as an unjustifiable interference.”<sup>10</sup> Weber purports that the best thing for the Christian message, and thus the church, is to separate itself all together from capitalistic means.

This separation between the sacred and the secular, however, would ignore the fact that economic outcome is intertwined in the fabric of modernity. Further, there is always a danger of the Christian message being corrupted by outside influences. This not only includes capitalism and capitalistic ventures in the West, but it can be argued that the same is true with liberation theology and its close ties to socialism. Even with the possibility of being influenced by modern social and political thought, the church cannot isolate itself from learning from possible secular innovators and thinkers. Robinson and Smith point out when speaking about the community, “The way in which we live and bear witness significantly influences the view that the wider community has of the church.”<sup>11</sup> Rejecting any and all practices influenced by capitalism fails to use and adapt practices that impact the community in a positive manner.

### **Political Engagement**

Jim Wallis is the founder and editor of *Sojourners* magazine, a publication whose purpose is to explore the possibility of Christian activism in one’s community. Over the years Wallis has tried to distance himself from political labels arguing that stereotypes prevent dialogue and conversation. By seeking separation from this partisan trap, Wallis’

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson and Smith, 60.



message of living a radical life in Christ, while being engaged in the social injustices of the world, attracts many young evangelicals to his message.<sup>12</sup>

In his book, *God's Politics*, Wallis sets up the premise that the only way the church will have a lasting impact on its neighboring community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is if the church has the fortitude to take back its faith in the “public square”: a faith, according to Wallis, that has been hijacked by the Right and ignored by the Left. To take this step, argues Wallis, the local church must engage in a more authentic, social witness.<sup>13</sup> Wallis pushes the notion that in the recent history of the church and the life of the individual believer, the Christian message of the Gospel has simply been replaced by political rhetoric to where the community outside the church has a difficult time distinguishing between the two. Interestingly enough, this is the same argument made by Weber in view of capitalism. It is for this reason, according to Wallis, that so many outside the church have been turned off by the church and its message, and thus the decline in church membership and influence in the community. Wallis encourages the church to discover an authentic voice for the sake of giving the community a bastion of hope in troubling times.

As matter of fact, Wallis believes that for both the church and the community, “there is no vision, no guiding moral compass, that steers our public life. We become bereft of meaning and purpose in our social relationships, we lose all sense of the common good or our shared humanity and the bonds of society themselves becomes so

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<sup>12</sup> Ted Olsen, “Where Jim Wallis Stands,” [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com), April 16, 2008, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/may/9.52.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 3.

frayed that each individual feels forced to just fend for themselves.”<sup>14</sup> Wallis holds that the fracturing of Right and Left has occurred not only within the church but also within the community. By the church rediscovering its authentic voice of the Gospel, the church is empowered to bring healing within the community.

Much in the same vain as Weber’s understanding of the possible corrosive effects capitalism has had and currently claims on the church’s message to the community, Wallis sees evidence of this same nature in the church’s relationship to government structures. Wallis believes “Christians should always live uneasily with empire, which constantly threatens to become idolatrous and substitutes secular purpose for God’s.”<sup>15</sup> Wallis, therefore, offers the church the possibility of participating and encouraging the community outside the church doors through creative, social engagement instead of simply repeating a political stump speech. He claims, “A political alternative brings more energy and possibilities to the public debate than political opposition can by itself. Being ‘for’ is better than only being ‘against.’ And ultimately it will be more successful.”<sup>16</sup> The church that offers hope is the church that influences the world in social engagement, instead of the world influencing the church through outside political pressures.

While Wallis calls for the church to find or even rediscover its authentic voice through social engagement, this engagement can still be seen by the community as “politics as usual” just repackaged in a different way. The notion of social engagement

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<sup>14</sup> Wallis, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49.

has always been fundamental to the faith, but it begs the question whether this should be the starting point taken by the local church when first reaching out to its community.

Ray Oldenburg, an American urban sociologist, shares the belief that, “In the sustained absence of a healthy and vigorous informal public life, the citizenry may quite literally forget how to create one.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Oldenburg writes, “A facilitating of public etiquette consisting of rituals necessary to meeting, greeting, and enjoyment of strangers is much in evidence in the United States.” This would move one to think that before the church can connect with its community through political engagement, the church has to earn the community’s trust through social interaction.

### **Corporate Evangelism (The Purpose Driven Church)**

Reverend Rick Warren, a Southern Baptist minister, is the founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Church, the famed megachurch in Orange County, California, which is also the home of the bankrupt Crystal Cathedral. He is known in both the evangelical and secular worlds for his best selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, one that seemed to bridge both worlds together. While holding to strong conservative theological views, Warren has managed to reach out to create a broader civic conversation.<sup>18</sup> This evenhanded approach has allowed Warren to additionally bridge the gap over political, religious and social divides.

In order to share with other churches Warren’s understanding of the successful growth of Saddleback Church, the senior pastor wrote the mass marketing phenomenon,

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<sup>17</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 13.

<sup>18</sup> “Transcript: CNN LIVE EVENT/SPECIAL,” *CNN*, August 16, 2008, accessed July 12, 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0808/16/se.02.html>

*The Purpose Driven Church*. For Warren, “Church growth is the natural result of church health. Church health can only occur when our message is biblical and our mission is balanced.” This includes the pastor of the church developing and producing the driving force to produce such strategies to make this a reality for the church.<sup>19</sup> Church growth and renewal does not happen by chance, but instead, this change for growth can only take place when the pastor casts a vision for the church to live within the process of a purpose. Warren claims the purpose or mission of the church, itself, must drive all things connected to the church life.

While the mega church pastor would never claim that method is more important than the message of the Gospel, and believing the message never changes, Warren does, however, emphasize the importance of the church in understanding that the methods of reaching out to the community must change with each generation.<sup>20</sup> This belief reinforces that the church must be willing to always analyze the way it approaches its neighboring community. Failure to approach change shows, according to Warren, that the church is asking the wrong question. “Too many churches are asking, ‘What will make our church grow?’ when they should be asking ‘What is keeping our church from growing?’”<sup>21</sup>

Even with highlighting the importance of “message over method,” *The Purpose Driven Church* reminds Christ followers that without an effective method, the message will never be heard. Believing this premise, Warren moves forward the claim that the methods that worked for Saddleback can be adapted to work for any local church in any

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub., 1995), 19, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 15.

community.<sup>22</sup> While not suggesting a cookie cutter approach to evangelism, but instead, calling the church to be creative in the way it interacts with the community, Warren seems to imply that by following certain steps, the church can produce positive results. Engagement with the community is equated to a system lived out.

While Warren is clear that the method of *The Purpose Driven Church* is meant to highlight the message of the Gospel and not to overshadow the mission of the church, there are moments in *The Purpose Driven Church* when that comes into question. For example, while Warren believes in the importance of the use of space as a welcoming area for believers to engage the visiting community; he seems to push the idea that somehow what the church does logistically in that space is more important than what is done spiritually—to the point that he stresses the use of canned music being played throughout the building.<sup>23</sup> This emphasis on method may easily be seen by the community as overly produced, or as a marketing scheme designed to bring in new members—i.e., givers—thus turning off the very people the church is trying to reach.

When the church continues to worry about counting people in the pew, the people in the pew shift from being a “soul” to simply being a statistic. Robinson and Smith share this belief when they point out that “mission is not evaluated first and foremost by growth of the church either in numbers or in power and influence, but primarily by the difference the church engaged in mission makes in the world.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus never said, “Follow me and I

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, 258.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson and Smith, 94.

will make fisherman of method and numbers, where one can judge success by economic indicators.”

### **Individual Evangelism (Contagious Christianity)**

Bill Hybels is the founding and senior pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, outside of Chicago. Willow Creek and Hybels are considered the most influential agents in the megachurch movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> As part of the development of the Willow Creek Association, Hybels annually hosts The Global Leadership Summit, which brings in speakers from the field of leadership, of both the Christian and secular worlds, in an attempt to equip pastors and lay leaders with leadership techniques and methods.

Much like Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church*, Bill Hybels wrote *Becoming a Contagious Christian* as a way to influence the local church as it reaches out to its community. Hybels is upfront in his intention. He states not only his desire for the reader, but also for the reader’s anticipated motive: reaching the lost. “And that, I trust, is your central motivation in reading this book. I hope you desire to get involved in what God is doing around the globe to search out and draw in people who are spiritually lost,” says Hybels.<sup>26</sup> However, Hybels, unlike Warren, seems to focus more on the individual understanding of the message of the Gospel in his or her own life and how such a narrative can influence one’s neighbor. Hybels stresses the importance that living out

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<sup>25</sup> Time Staff, “The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America,” *Time*, February 7, 2005, accessed July 12, 2014, [http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0%2C28804%2C1993235\\_1993243\\_1993288%2C00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0%2C28804%2C1993235_1993243_1993288%2C00.html)

<sup>26</sup> Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 22.

one's faith must be tied back to the people found in one's community. Reflecting from his attraction to secular leadership principles, Hybels states, "Businesses, if they're going to be successful for the long haul, must pull their attention off themselves and refocus their energies on their only reason for existence—to serve their customer."<sup>27</sup> In practical terms, Hybels claims that living out the Gospel message moves the believer to be servant to one's neighbor.

Hybels extracts this servant life with the theorem of HP+CP+CC=MI or written out as High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact. The whole understanding of evangelism and outreach into one's community for Hybels is a belief that "God wants us to become contagious Christians—His agents, who will first catch His love and then urgently and infectiously offer it to all who are willing to consider it" and at the same time recognize "the common misconception that the most vital and meaningful approach to evangelism involves making contact with people we don't know. Exactly the opposite is true, he claims. It's people *we do know* who have already developed a measure of trust in us and our motives, and are therefore most in range of influence."<sup>28</sup> The outcome of these connectional relationships empowers the believer to connect with one's neighbors, but more importantly, to connect one's neighbor to the Gospel message and eventually to God.

While *Becoming a Contagious Christian* seems to stress message over method, there seems to be a danger to seeing HP+CP+CC=MI as another formulated evangelism program for the local church to follow. What happens when nothing happens at the end of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 23, 108,109, italics mine.

sharing the message through a connectional relationship? Did the believer fail? Did the church fail? This fear was actually realized through an internal survey of the Willow Creek congregation, wherein Hybels and the leadership of the church discovered “Increasing levels of participation in these sets of activities does *not* predict whether someone’s becoming more of a disciple of Christ. It does *not* predict whether they love God more or they love people more.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the changing climate of western civilization for both mainline and evangelical churches, it is important for the local congregation to continually examine how the church reaches out to the community beyond its doors. Examining different ideas and methods of outreach strengthens a church and its resolve in this endeavor. Failing to do nothing relative to this evangelical endeavor only increases the probability that the local church will continue to decline. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley noted, “People (the community) are honestly trying to balance the frantic privacy of the suburbs with some kind of spontaneous public life.”<sup>30</sup> As the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues, the church must ask how it connects to a community that continues to live within this divided desire.

Examining other solutions to the ongoing problem of decline and disconnect for the local church points to the complexity of the problem. The four alternatives: anti-capitalistic approach, political engagement, church structure and purpose, and individual

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<sup>29</sup> “Willow Creek Repents?” editorial, Christianitytoday.com, October 18, 2007, accessed July 2, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/parse/2007/october/willow-creek-repents.html?paging=off>

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley, “Divided By Sprawl,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1999, 42.



and corporate evangelism provide insight into the daily challenges that face the church. Each offers positive alternatives. While it would be arrogant to assume that these four approaches alone are the keys to changing the tide of decline, all four approaches bring understanding about church structures and the overall problem, and even some signs of success in reaching its community.

Weber shows the possible corruption that can corrode the church's message. Wallis calls for the church to be engaged in a community that longs for the church to live out the Gospel. Warren points the church toward a divine purpose that shapes its thinking. Hybels' plea is for individuals to understand one's faith as a bridge to the community, not a barrier. Each alternative has its flaws. Weber fails to see that God is a God that can even be found in capitalism. Wallis believes that the desired conversation of the world outside the church walls centers around politics. Warren suggests the belief that if the church is not growing, it must be doing something wrong, and that somehow, method determines everything, including even the message. Hybels believes that conversations with the community must always center on conversion before connection.

The overall challenge the church faces is the willingness of its members to live in such a way that embraces the strangers in their midst, not only for the sake of conversion, but to develop an everlasting connection. Neither can the church see this life shared with strangers as simply method over message, but understand this radical new way life as produced through the life of the church—a life of hospitality for the sake of the community the church has been called to serve. The question is simply this: can the church put aside the fear of decline and disconnect in order to practice radical hospitality for the sake of the community?

## SECTION 3: THESIS

### Introduction

In a world where technology changes in a blink of an eye and community is being defined and is currently evolving on Facebook and Twitter, Starbucks C.E.O., Howard Schultz puts forth, “For all the promise of digital media to bring people together, I still believe that the most sincere, lasting powers of human connection come from looking directly into someone else’s eyes, with no screen in between.”<sup>1</sup> The results of Schultz’s business model for the Starbucks Corporation can be synthesized down to the unwavering loyalty of the daily customer with the coffeehouse and those who serve the coffee.<sup>2</sup>

Since the day of Pentecost, the church has wrestled with understanding its role in the community, while at the same time trying to communicate the Good News of the Gospel. To the local community, the message and the practices of the church often appear inwardly focused to the point of exclusion in both word and in deed. As one recent visitor to a neighboring church reported, “It is almost as if the church is saying, ‘Come, but don’t participate. Participate, but don’t touch. Touch, but don’t taste. Taste, but don’t enjoy.’”<sup>3</sup> Even when a local church thinks that its worship and missional life is inclusive of those outside its walls, often its actions—and in many cases, inactions—are perceived by many outside the church as just another reason not to engage in the faith, the church and its members.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Schultz and Joanne Gordon, *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul* (New York: Rodale. 2011), Kindle, 193.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Nichols, “Restaurant Rating: McDonald’s, Starbucks Rank High with Executives.” August 30, 2013, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://finance.yahoo.com/blogs/the-exchange/restaurant-ratings-mcdonald-starbucks-rank-high-execs-205227636.html>

<sup>3</sup> “Interview with Starbucks Customers,” interview by author, spring 2014.

One of the historic and spiritual marks of the church has been the outward acts of Christian hospitality. The Book of Acts highlights the movement of giving and receiving through outward acts of hospitality among believers and unbelievers.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of mainline and evangelical decline, most local congregations readily point out how their particular church takes care of their church members who are in need, but this grace does not always translate beyond the church walls. Frustrated in its lack of ability to communicate hospitality to its community, the local congregation often points out their attempts to reach out. However, in response, the community's most likely opinion is that they view these efforts of "evangelism" or "outreach" for reasons of conversion rather than hospitality for the sake of connection.

Tim Chester, director of the Porterbrook Seminary, points out, "The hospitality to which Jesus calls us can't be institutionalized in programs and projects."<sup>5</sup> For Chester, hospitality is not birthed out of "a budgeted line item" of a church's annual budget, but is born in the "home" of one called to live out one's faith in the world. It is for this reason that what often stops the local church and its members from living out a life of hospitality is an underlying fear that hospitality is too scary, too costly; or that people are too busy. Chester's definition of hospitality is indeed, costly. If this be true, the church would do well to consider the personal cost of its members. What are we being called to? If this is the case, it is one more reason the outside world interprets the church's actions as withdrawing further and further within its walls.

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:42-47 points to Christian hospitality within the church while Acts 3:1-10 and 4:32-36 reflect a hospitality that goes beyond the circle of believers.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, & Mission Around the Table* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), Kindle, loc. 1395-1398.

An even more compelling argument used by the local church for not being engaged in the community is the fact that often their neighbors do not look or sound like the church. Yet for Christine Pohl, this very fact is the motivation for the church to extend outward hospitality. As Pohl points out, “when hospitality is a way of life for the local church and its members, the strangers and guests we welcome seem to be wide and varied compared to the person who stares back at us in the mirror.”<sup>6</sup> It is through this possible diversity that the church is able to understand the full measure of God’s grace and boundless possibilities.

The driving force of outward Christian hospitality is “the giving of one’s self to others,” when believers open their lives in the sharing of grace to those they encounter both inside and outside the church. Those whom the local church and the believer encounter inside and outside the church can never be predetermined, but the church and the believer should be empowered as to how that person will be greeted, treated and embraced. Hospitality is the act of welcoming people into the grace that is Jesus Christ; it is the expression of the church’s gratitude for the grace of Jesus Christ and a genuine desire for the world to experience that same grace. Pohl stresses this understanding; “The connection between gratitude to God and love for others is clear in several of John Wesley’s sermons when he states that ‘steady good will to our fellow-creatures never flowed from any fountain but gratitude to our Creator.’”<sup>7</sup>

Corporately, this welcome is illustrated in the way the Chick-fil-a Corporation trains it employees in working with its guests:

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<sup>6</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2012), Kindle, loc. 290-291.

<sup>7</sup> Pohl, *Living in Community*, loc. 253-256.

At the end of each transaction at Chick-fil-A, you don't hear, "You're welcome," "Glad to help," or "Come back and see us." You hear these two words: "My pleasure." It's distinctive and classy, the sort of service you expect at a much fancier and expensive establishment, like Ritz Carlton, which is where Cathy says his father got the idea.<sup>8</sup>

Purposefully, The Chick-fil-A Corporation wants all of its costumers to know they are valued and that their visits to the restaurant matter. Through this form of outward hospitality the encounter affects both the corporation and the customer.

Reflecting back on the church, Henry Brinton points to what is so often forgotten by the local church, "People are attracted to congregations that put faith into action and radiate excitement about making a difference in the world. Jesus said that those who lose their life for his sake will save it, and he was absolutely right."<sup>9</sup> What the community wants to know is do they matter to the local church. Do their needs matter? Do their dreams matter? Do their hopes matter? Are those in the community seen by the church as simply possible future members, ones who will put money into the offering plate? Or is the church willing to change their lives for the good of the community? Gray-Reeves and Perham highlight this: "The congregations invested in, belonged to, understood and expressed care for those in their communities, and there was consistent invitation to those seeking to be a partner in conversation about Christianity."<sup>10</sup> The practice of outward hospitality put in place by the church shows the community that the sheep outside the

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<sup>8</sup> Chuck Salter. "Chick-fil-A's Recipe for Customer Service." *Fast Company*, 2013, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://www.fastcompany.com/resources/customer/chickfila.html>

<sup>9</sup> Henry G. Brinton, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), Kindle, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Gray-Reeves and Michael Perham, *The Hospitality of God: Emerging Worship for a Missional Church* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), Kindle, loc. 608-612.

church matter just as much as those inside. This interaction is a blessing both to church and community.

### **A Biblical Mandate**

The central theme of hospitality is repeated over again in both the Old and New Testament through theme and narrative. Pohl reflects this truth:

Many stories of hospitality contain elements of mystery and surprise, because God is so often present in unexpected ways. Needy strangers turn out to be angels; beggars are somehow Jesus in disguise. Resources are in short supply yet miraculously sufficient; sometimes there is even abundance when what is available is shared.<sup>11</sup>

In the Old Testament hospitality is offered to the stranger even within the tension of the unknown and uncertainty of life which is formed and shaped in the Law, especially in the ways one treats the stranger or foreigner in one's midst.

Again Pohl notes, "What was distinctive to Israelite society was the explicit legislation regarding the protection of and provision for the resident alien."<sup>12</sup> This tension within the unknown and uncertainty and faithfully living within the Law is witnessed when Abraham and Sarah play host to the three strangers.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the strangers do not come to Abraham. Abraham *goes out* to greet the strangers. Abraham not only welcomes the three guests into his "home" as his culture and faith prescribes; Abraham goes further by taking on the role of servant, actively moving beyond his tent walls, engaging the three strangers in the community, and bringing them from the outside into his home. Abraham expects nothing in return as he lives out

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<sup>11</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, loc. 299-301.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 361.

<sup>13</sup> Gen. 18:1-15.

hospitality; yet, through the act of hospitality, Sarah and Abraham are blessed with the knowledge that they will welcome a son into their lives even in their old age.

Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus instructs those who follow him that the importance of hospitality as witnessed in the Old Testament is not only to be continued in the fulfillment of the Law, but that hospitality is to remain a mandate in one's understanding of salvation. In Jesus' parable of The Sheep and The Goats, he explains the importance of showing hospitality to the stranger who is hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and even those who are imprisoned. Failure to do so shows a lack of oneness with Jesus and his ministry and helps determine the hereafter.<sup>14</sup> What is illustrated in this parable is a new paradigm: "those who have welcomed strangers and have met the needs of persons in distress have welcomed Jesus himself, and are themselves welcomed into the Kingdom. God's invitation into the Kingdom is tied to Christian hospitality in this life."<sup>15</sup> Jesus moves the believer from thinking hospitality is something we are obligated to do because of the Law, to understanding that hospitality is born out of a faith lived out in the world. Hospitality becomes the central calling of the Christian.

The mandate for a life of hospitality is given to the church in Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul writes in the twelfth chapter,

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Matt. 25:31-46.

<sup>15</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, loc. 278-279.

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 12:9-13.

The Greek word that is used in the thirteenth verse is “φιλοξενία” or *philoxenia* which is used by Paul as a reminder that faith in Christ and hospitality intertwines the believer with one’s community and that acts of hospitality must be practiced again and again in a never ending pursuit of trying to get it right.

A word of caution here is necessary, however. Author of a commentary on the book Romans, Paul Achtemeier, raises a cautionary note about the tendency toward legalism, rather than acts of grace:

Life shaped in the way Paul describes it is therefore grateful response to the God who has delivered us from our slavery to sin. These admonitions are the not “law” in the sense of requirements we must fulfill if God is to accept us. Paul is not smuggling in the law through the back door, as it were, in his ethical admonitions. The admonitions are not contrary to grace, they are the response to grace taken seriously enough to shape one’s life accordingly.<sup>17</sup>

The church lives out hospitality, not because it has to, but because it is called to do so. In the same way Jesus shared grace with the believer, so the believer hears the call to share grace through hospitality with those around him or her. The challenge is nevertheless great. Karl Barth writes in *The Epistle to the Romans*,

For him [Paul] the significance of charity [hospitality] lies in its ‘form’, not in its ‘matter’. By charity the tension between self and others is overcome; and, for this reason, charity is a demonstration of the recognition of the ‘One’ in others. It is this recognition, which makes of charity an ethical action.<sup>18</sup>

Barth demonstrates that for hospitality to be effective in the life of the believer, the difficult step must be taken to overcome the barriers between believer and stranger that must be breached repeatedly.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 200.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford U.P., 1968), 459.



### **Hospitality Witnessed in the “Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service”**

While Starbucks’ C.E.O., Howard Schultz, may not have a biblical harvest in mind when defining the mission of his company, he appreciates the implication of hospitality as a form of customer service. He believes that it is through hospitality that Starbucks is able to produce a brand loyalty within the community it serves. Held to the commitment of providing hospitality, the Starbucks Corporation has developed “Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service” for its local coffeehouses to implement. The Four Pillars focus the barista to anticipate, connect, personalize, and own the needs of the customer. A foundational argument for this study is that if these Four Pillar practices are adopted by the local church, they would prove to be practical ways for church members to reach out to their community, develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with the people who live and work beyond the church walls. At the same time the practice of hospitality empowers one to share his faith in Christ in both word and deed, and thus inviting the community to have a relationship with Jesus.

#### **Starbucks’ Four Pillars for World Class Service: Anticipate, Connect, Personalize, Own**

Similar to Starbucks Four Pillars of World Class Service, Leonard Sweet recognizes the unrelenting need for a “lived out” hospitality in the community. Sweet defines it as, “EPIC: experience, participation, images that throb with meaning, and connection.”<sup>19</sup> Similar to Sweet’s vision, Starbucks Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service are less likely steps for a church to take in order to live out hospitality, and more likely the means through which the church expresses its story of faith to the

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<sup>19</sup> Leonard I. Sweet and Edward H. Hammett, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press. 2007), Kindle, loc. 327-329.

community. The Four Pillars are built upon the principles of: anticipate, connect, personalize, and own.

### *Anticipate*

Starbucks' first pillar, in its pursuit to live hospitably, is to anticipate the needs of its customers. Much like the Starbucks coffeehouse, churches with an established ministry of hospitality reaching beyond the sanctuary walls into the community, accomplish this only through hours of planning and preparation. Through this line of strategic thinking, hospitality is viewed as a natural response to faith as witnessed in the life of an individual believer within the collective whole of the church. However, churches must understand hospitality as a well-thought-out approach in connecting and building relationships.

Malcolm Gladwell claims, "Achievement is talent plus preparation."<sup>20</sup> Gladwell's reflections prove true in Barth's understanding of hospitality, as found in Romans 12, where hospitality is a matter of "form." Success is born out of interpretation of the objective: in this case outward hospitality. Just as knowledge of coffee is important for Starbucks, so is the knowledge of its target customer base before that customer even walks through the doors. Preparation is the beginning of customer service for the local Starbucks coffeehouse and is emphasized at the start of any employee training. Taylor Clark clarifies,

It wasn't just the drinks that Starbucks adapted to the consumer's desires; the company also designed its stores with the customer's subconscious in mind. Howard Schultz might claim that Starbucks was "built on the human spirit," but it was really shaped after the human id.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Back Bay, 2008), Kindle, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor Clark, *Starbucked: A Double Tall Tale of Caffeine, Commerce, and Culture* (New York: Little Brown, 2007), Kindle, loc. 1487-1489.

It is through this detailed anticipation of the customer and the customer's needs that management and baristas are able to answer questions and come up with solutions to problems before issues arise. The anticipation of the customer prepares the workers for future service; therefore, easing possible anxieties of unknown reactions baristas might experience while making a customer's coffee.

Carl Medearis, known author and lecturer, has spent his ministry bridging the gap between the Muslim and Christian religions. What may at first seem like a giant leap, in fact, brings illumination. Medearis shared a similar understanding of preparation in the implementation of hospitality when he expressed the following at the Connecting Mission Leadership Conference:

Instead of assuming that all Muslims want to kill us, just assume that Muslims will actually like us. We need to assume that the visitors visit our churches because they want to be there... they may not know what to do next, but what we do know is they have a desire to be present in that moment.<sup>22</sup>

Anticipation has less to do with predetermination of future customers and more to do with working with the customers to enhance their experiences. By anticipating the customers and the customers' needs *in a positive light*, the Starbucks' employees are empowered in organization and forward thinking in their approach to customer service.

The same is true for the believer in the way he or she approaches one's community.

Leonard Sweet reflects this sentiment when he writes,

This is what makes the Starbucks experience authentic rather than staged. In spite of being engineered to sell coffee, Starbucks does everything corporately possible not to create a preplanned compelling experience for the customer, but to help

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<sup>22</sup> Medearis.

customers create experiences for themselves. Starbucks wants to help you experience from the heart something that you will enjoy and share with friends.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of predetermining an outcome, the anticipation application gives employees the power to prepare for the unpredictability of the customers' needs.

In an interview with the author of this study, Cory Long, the general manager of a three million dollar Starbucks coffeehouse in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, further stressed the importance of anticipation. Long, who has worked for Starbucks for eight years, started as a barista his senior year in high school. He pointed out, "Every new employee is nervous about serving his first customer and making his first cup of coffee. The first step in positive training is to put the employee at ease."<sup>24</sup> The anticipation of knowing both coffee and customer is one and the same. Just as much time goes into training future employees to know future customers as in tasting the hint of citrus in the Sumatra blend. This oneness is meant to create an atmosphere that produces a constant and positive experience for both parties involved.

In understanding the foundation of positive habits, Charles Duhigg reflects on the practice of anticipation,

The company [Starbucks] needed to train its employees to deliver a bit of joy alongside lattes and scones. So early on, Starbucks started researching how they could teach employees to regulate their emotions and marshal their self-discipline to deliver a burst of pep with every serving.<sup>25</sup>

Duhigg further states, "If a worker knows how to remain focused and disciplined, even at the end of an eight-hour shift, they'll deliver the higher class of fast food service that

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<sup>23</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, loc. 560-662.

<sup>24</sup> Long, "Interview with Starbucks Management." Interview by author, November 8, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012), Kindle, loc. 2230-2232.

Starbucks customers expect.”<sup>26</sup> On the surface, the customer will not know the hours in training and preparing the barista to make the customer’s experience positive and profitable, but the payoff comes for Starbucks when the customer comes back on a daily basis because of the anticipation of hospitality, thus, creating brand loyalty.<sup>27</sup>

This loyalty goes far beyond coffee. As Howard Schultz puts it, “Starbucks is at its best when we are creating enduring relationships and personal connections.”<sup>28</sup> Hospitality is meant to go beyond surface conversations as one learns more and more about the needs of those around him. Leonard Sweet translates this thought for the church by calling the church to “anticipate the nudge” to see what both God is doing in the world and what God calls the church to do in the lives of one’s neighbors.<sup>29</sup> A local church that anticipates the needs of its neighbors bears witness to the church’s desire to be in relationship with those outside the church, bridging the gap between the two.

With anticipation being the foundation of equipping Starbucks employees to implement hospitality through knowing coffee and customer, the fruit of this anticipation is a closer connection between the customer and the barista. Sweet points out, “Coffee brings people together. That’s why we don’t have an idiom in the English language along the lines of, “Let’s stay apart for coffee.” It’s always, “Let’s get together for coffee.” And

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<sup>26</sup> Duhigg, loc. 2233-2235.

<sup>27</sup> This commitment by Starbucks to practice as a form of anticipation of the needs of the customer was witnessed in February 2008 when every Starbucks in the United States closed for the day. The note that was left on the door of each coffeehouse read, “We’re taking time to perfect our espresso. Great espresso requires practice. That’s why we’re dedicating ourselves to honing our craft.”

<sup>28</sup> Schultz, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who’s Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), Kindle, loc. 1194.

isn't getting together what makes us human, the social bond that we share as fellow creations of God?"<sup>30</sup>

### *Connect*

Connection with one's customer is Starbucks' second pillar for World Class Customer Service. The Starbucks manager interviewed in person for this study, Cory Long, emphatically stated that he constantly instructs all future and established baristas in his supervision, "I would much rather you know a customer's name than his coffee order. If you want to make someone's day, call that person by their name only after the third time you have met him." Long emphasizes the purpose of Starbucks as "not a coffee business serving people, but a people business serving coffee."<sup>31</sup> Writing a customer's name on the coffee cup is to make sure the order is correct. Calling out the customer's name is to establish connection.

Medearis further concurs with the importance of connection in the Muslim culture and around the globe. He says, "knowing someone's name and his wife's name and his child's name breaks down stereotypes we place on people before we even say hello."<sup>32</sup> This type of connection is made even stronger when the customer learns the Starbucks barista's name creating a deeper interaction between the two. Even the friendly, but generic salutation of "Welcome to Starbucks," opens the door for a relational connection from the natural response of anticipating the customer.

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<sup>30</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, loc. 1962-1964.

<sup>31</sup> Long.

<sup>32</sup> Medearis.

Howard Behar, former president of Starbucks, believed early on in the formation of the company that connection was the key to building a lasting relationship between employee and customer. He writes,

We knew if we broke that trust with ourselves and our customers, we wouldn't be who we are; we wouldn't be on the right path. Part of that trust was grounded in our belief that people mattered and we had to show it in everything we did.<sup>33</sup>

Connection binds the customer to the created reality that he matters to the baristas and thus, matters to the corporation. Developing this connection built through hospitality is the belief that a bond is established not only between the customer and the local coffeehouse in general, but more specifically, the customer is attached to the overall Starbucks brand. Connection allows the customer to comfortably walk into a Starbucks in his hometown as well as any other Starbucks in the world. Michelli reflects on the connection implemented:

When others can rely on you to provide them with exactly what they expect, no matter where they are, you reinforce the image and strength of your brand in the place that matters most: the minds and hearts of your customers. Your brand literally becomes the standard by which other companies are measured.<sup>34</sup>

By writing the customer's name on the cup, the Starbucks in London, England may not offer the exact same experience as the Starbucks in the customer's hometown, but each coffeehouse works hard to make sure it is the next best thing.

Another result of connection is the possibility of bonding the customer to a greater community, building fellowship within the coffeehouse itself. While the purchase of a cup of coffee is an individual act between the customer and the barista, the invitation

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<sup>33</sup> Howard Behar and Janet Goldstein, *It's Not About the Coffee: Leadership Principles from a Life at Starbucks* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), Kindle, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph A. Michelli, *The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), Kindle, loc. 1389-1391.

exists and space is made available for relationships to be explored within the coffeehouse. Long calls this time and space “third place.”<sup>35</sup> During our interview, Long explains that “third place” is corporate language to suggest that Starbucks is neither home, nor office; rather, the coffeehouse is a comfortable place to explore relationships. This does not mean that fellowship is forced upon the customer, but space for fellowship is freely offered.

Starbucks is not without its critics when it comes to their understanding of “third place.” Ray Oldenburg, guru of “third place” theology, goes so far as to say, “Officials of a popular coffeehouse chain often claim that their establishments are third places, but they aren’t. They may evolve into them but at present, they are high volume, fast turnover operations that present an institutional ambience at an intimate level. Seating is uncomfortable by design and customers in line are treated rudely when uncertain of their orders.”<sup>36</sup> However, even if this shortcoming is a reality for some, the faithful customers do not seem to mind. Michelli points out, “By providing a high-quality, consistent customer experience, Starbucks offers a place for conversation, connection, and reconnection. For this reason, customers incorporate Starbucks into the rituals of their lives.”<sup>37</sup>

The act of the daily ritual plays out not only in the buying of coffee, but the connection to others who are buying coffee too. As a local church seeks connection with its community, both the church and its members have the opportunity to produce “third

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<sup>35</sup> Long.

<sup>36</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the “Great Good Places” at the Heart of Our Communities* (New York: Marlowe &, 2001), Kindle, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Michelli, loc. 1412-1413.



place” within the church itself. This connection for the church according to Sweet is the beginning of new possibilities, “Sometimes a nudge will lead to conversion, but most often it will lead to a conversation, a confession, a connection, maybe a germination, but always a blessing.”<sup>38</sup> The blessing as described by Sweet is mutually exclusive for the church and its community.

### *Personalize*

The third pillar of World Class Customer Service, as demonstrated by Starbucks, is personalization. Sweet stresses the new-found importance in personalization when he notes, “The popular slogan, ‘eat fresh, buy local,’ has shifted the entire food industry from industrialized and monopolized to personalized and relational.... The vines and branches of our human spirit are pushing through the cracks in our concrete sidewalks and buildings, rescuing us from the prison of individualism and hierarchy, returning us to a thriving garden of relationship.”<sup>39</sup> Likewise, personalizing hospitality for Starbucks goes beyond just knowing a person’s name.

Symbolically, personalized hospitality is witnessed when the barista not only knows the customer’s name, but also the customer’s order. Clark speaks of this as cultivating “validation and refinement” of the customer’s demeanor.<sup>40</sup> This means changing the barista’s mindset from merely handing a cup of coffee to an unknown entity to making coffee for someone he knows and actually cares about. Long’s own personal

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<sup>38</sup> Sweet, *Nudge*, loc. 367-368.

<sup>39</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), Kindle, 176.

<sup>40</sup> Clark, loc. 650-651.

story reflects this attitude: “When Starbucks hired me, it saved my life.”<sup>41</sup> Long cites that Starbucks gave him more than just a job and a paycheck. Starbucks gave him direction and worth. For Long, this life-changing event must not be kept a secret, but shared with the world; just like sharing the story of the faith must not be kept a secret, but must be shared with the world too.

Long’s sentiment towards Starbucks is not by mistake. According to Behar,

At Starbucks we’re in the human service business, not the customer service business. That means the coffee has to be excellent, from the sourcing and growing to the roasting and brewing. The vision has to be inspiring and meaningful to our partners, the communities we’re a part of, and all the people we serve. Our finances have to be in order so we can do the work we love. But without people, we have nothing. With people, we have something even bigger than coffee.<sup>42</sup>

For Starbucks, personalization is the belief that what is offered at a coffeehouse truly matters to the barista and to the customer. Medearis also reflects this belief in the value of product and customer through his work with Muslims and Christians. He claims that the only thing that should matter for the Christian is offering a Muslim personal hospitality.

He bluntly states,

We [the believer] can only do one of two things: Give them Jesus or give them wasted sewage. We can either point the way to the Way or confuse them with a load of things that will never feed their need for God. There is a place for doctrines and dogma and science and history and apologetics, but these things are not Jesus—they are humanly manufactured attempts to make people think that having the right ideas is the same thing as loving and following Jesus.<sup>43</sup>

Medearis pushes this thought further by saying that just as Starbucks simply presents coffee, so the church simply needs to present Jesus. More than anything Starbucks is

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<sup>41</sup> Long.

<sup>42</sup> Behar, 1,2.

<sup>43</sup> Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus the Art of Not-evangelism* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011), Kindle, 26.

about coffee, and those who walk through the door deserve a good cup of coffee with everything else being secondary. Personalization is the belief that the product being offered is able to change lives, and that the product is specifically being offered to the customer because the barista or Christian believes the customer is deserving of the product.

Personalization is a chain of connections developed between the customer, Starbucks, and the coffee, where each part is not greater than the sum of the whole; each part is equal. An example of this personalization is the annual offering of the Pumpkin Spice Latte.<sup>44</sup> The personalized relationship is lived out every day as an unwritten script performed every time a cup of coffee is bought at Starbucks. Schulz describes this personalization as the moment when, “We take something ordinary and infuse it with emotion and meaning, and then we tell its story over and over and over again, often without saying a word.”<sup>45</sup> The local church that personalizes itself to its community shows a church and its members who are attuned to the needs and struggles of its neighbors.

### *Own*

The final pillar for Starbucks is to own one’s experience. This pillar of quality customer service goes beyond the traditional commitment of providing a product to sell for a customer to purchase. Ownership is an unwritten contract between barista and

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<sup>44</sup> Laura Suval, “What Is Behind the Hype of Autumn? Pumpkin Spice Latte? |World of Psychology.” Psych Central.com. October 24, 2013, accessed November 2, 2013, <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/10/24/what-is-behind-the-hype-of-autumn-pumpkin-spice-latte/>

<sup>45</sup> Schultz, 12.

customer to be mutually and connectively responsible for one another's experiences.

Ownership is key to the overall success of Starbucks. For Schultz,

Success is not sustainable if it's defined by how big you become. Large numbers that once captivated me—40,000 stores!—are not what matter. The only number that matters is “one.” One cup. One customer. One partner. One experience at a time.<sup>46</sup>

Schultz furthers this thought by personally claiming, “I've always believed that innovation is about rethinking the nature of relationships, not just rethinking products.”<sup>47</sup>

The “one” experience offered by Starbucks becomes customized to the individual customer's desire in choice of coffee to the conversations he might have with the barista and fellow customers. Behar, reflecting on his early days at Starbucks, points out that this was not always the case. In its infancy, Starbucks adopted the approach of snobbery, that is, it did not matter what the customer liked or preferred. Early it was believed, the customer should simply buy, drink, and like Starbucks coffee because Starbucks was only about good coffee. Behar confessed,

It was crystal clear that we had become too wrapped up in the coffee and our knowledge of it, to the exclusion of the real business we were in—the business of people. Our love for coffee was clear to us, but our love for people was not clear to ourselves or our customers. We got swept up in our passion for the product instead of our passion for the people. This was a critical moment in the history of Starbucks.<sup>48</sup>

The Starbucks customer's experience is just as vital as the coffee itself. Long points out that a customer can truly have it her way every time she walks into Starbucks. She can

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>48</sup> Behar, 71.

fully participate in controlling her experience or having the experience shaped by the barista she has grown to trust. Long writes,

If she simply wants to order a cup of black coffee that she orders day after day, great. But let's say one day she walks in and thinks, 'my life changes today' and she orders a grande, iced, sugar-free, vanilla latte with soy milk. Not only can Starbucks make that happen. We want to make it happen.<sup>49</sup>

Long further suggests, "If she does not know what she wants, because of our relationship built over time, we can point her in the right direction." This type of relationship often takes trial and error, but it is born through acts of hospitality until the customer is fully made comfortable in the decision-making process.

Owning one's experience is further enhanced by a now fundamental belief by the Starbucks Corporation that this connection goes beyond just the barista/customer relationship. Through the social activism of recent years, Starbucks pushes the boundaries of relationship by communicating a third party connection with the world outside the coffeehouse.<sup>50</sup> For example, by pushing the customer to develop the ownership of one's experience outside the coffeehouse into the world, Starbucks opened itself to critics on the political Left with Schultz's recent disapproval of the rollout of Obamacare. Conversely, critics on the Right objected to the recent corporate decision to ban legally carried firearms on its property. It was not by chance that Starbucks engaged the community in this manner. As Michelli points out,

Starbucks leadership captures the company's social commitment in the mission statement, which notes that Starbucks will "contribute positively to our communities and our environment." Beyond simply stating that commitment,

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<sup>49</sup> Long.

<sup>50</sup> This connection is also reflected in Medearis' work when he points that when one opens himself to a world beyond his own, he is confronted with and connected to people in a relationship that is not based on conversion, but one based on *conversation*.

managers at Starbucks work diligently to make sure that their mission and values guide their day-to-day business decisions.<sup>51</sup>

Starbucks' commitment to the community through acts of hospitality makes it clear to the barista that he is making more than just coffee. This commitment to hospitality makes it clear to the customer that he too is doing something more than just buying coffee. Both the barista and the customer are creating and owning the experience—an experience that might just change the world. Likewise, a church that owns outward, radical hospitality is a church that is called to engage and serve those in its community.

### **Implication in Applications of The Four Pillars in the Life of the Church**

If the practices of hospitality implemented by Starbucks through The Four Pillars are practical for the local church in developing deeper and more meaningful relationships with people who live and work beyond the church walls, then it is sensible to ask, “What are the implications in the applications for the local church as she lives out hospitality in the midst of her community?” Alan Hirsch, a leader in the missional church movement, describes this possibility for the church: “[By] living incarnationally we not only model the pattern of humanity set up in the Incarnation but also create space for mission to take place in organic ways. In this way, mission becomes something that ‘fits’ seamlessly into the ordinary rhythms of life, friendships, and community and is thus thoroughly contextualized.”<sup>52</sup> As mentioned previously, not only can the local church learn to develop a plan of hospitality meant to embrace its surrounding community as reflected in

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<sup>51</sup> Michelli, loc. 1962-1964.

<sup>52</sup> Alan Hirsch and Leonard Sweet *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), Kindle loc. 2239-2241.

the business practices of a Starbucks coffeehouse; but pushing the conversation further, those outside the church could note how Starbucks' secular practices of hospitality may produce a more welcoming community than currently found in some churches. The researcher hypothesizes that observing and cataloguing Starbucks' brand of hospitality predicts practical applications of hospitality for local church. The remainder of Section 3 focuses on four common themes garnered from customer interviews: invitation, space, connection and ownership.

### *Invitation*

In conversations with a pool of Starbucks customers, every customer eventually mentioned that he or she began to come to Starbucks because of an invitation. The invitation to get coffee was made by someone whom the future customer trusted, had a personal relationship with, or knew before the invitation was made. As one customer said, "I probably would have never walked into Starbucks and bought a \$4 cup of coffee if it were not for the fact that my neighbor invited me for coffee."<sup>53</sup> The invitation made for having coffee was always connected to a direct purpose.

While the vast number of invitations was for the purpose of socializing, many of the invitations were made in order to conduct business. Interestingly enough, the least frequently cited reason for the invitation was to simply drink coffee. However, the line between the purpose of the invitation and the drinking of coffee became blurred if not erased, thus connecting one to the other. This notion is enforced in Michael Frost's description of the need to abandon strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profane spaces in our world. Frost claims the invitation made and the invitation accepted

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Starbucks Customers. March 8, 2014.

is “the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption.”<sup>54</sup> Most of the customers interviewed shared how the invitation offered gave them an appreciation of connection long before they even entered Starbucks.

The invitation continues for the first-time customer when he is greeted by the barista and asked, “How can I help you?” As one customer proclaimed, “It was the first time anyone ever asked what kind of coffee I wanted and, of course, I had to ask, ‘What kind of coffee do you got?’”<sup>55</sup> From the initial invitation to meet for coffee to the barista asking what kind would he like, the first-time customer experiences a sense of welcoming and worth. It is the invitation to belong and connect in a world where, too often, many feel disconnected. It is the invitation to be in community. For which M. Scott Peck defines well:

If we are going to use the word [community] meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to “rejoice together, mourn together,” and to delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own.<sup>56</sup>

Whether the ones being invited know it or not, they are being invited to do something more than just drink coffee. They are being invited to explore community. Most customers often return the favor by inviting others to experience Starbucks and its coffee.

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), Kindle, 327-328.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Starbucks Customers. March 8, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Peck, M. Scott *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 59.



One customer remarked, “Now I invite people all the time to have coffee with me at Starbucks.”<sup>57</sup>

Steve Hayner, the retired President of Columbia Theological Seminary and the former President of The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, believes that reaching beyond the church walls, likewise, must start with an invitation—the purposeful expression of Christian hospitality. He points out, “The church must remember just as we have received [the love of Jesus] so we are called to give. It is not that what we have to offer makes us better off than the world. It is what we have to offer has made us better and we want those in the world to experience the same joy.”<sup>58</sup> Just as most interviewed customers shared with the researcher that their relationship with Starbucks began with an invitation, Hayner points out that most people outside the church engage the church when an invitation is made from someone within the church. This invitation is not necessarily to come to church for worship, but to experience church in a nonthreatening way. Everyone in the church is capable of extending an invitation to someone outside the church. David Platt, current the president of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, points out,

In Jesus’ simple command to “make disciples,” he has invited every one of his followers to share the life of Christ with others in a sacrificial, intentional, global effort to multiply the gospel of Christ through others. He never intended to limit this invitation to the most effective communicators, the most brilliant organizers, or the most talented leaders and artists—all the allegedly right people that you and I are prone to exalt in the church.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Starbucks Customers. March 8, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Steve Hayner. March 20, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> David Platt, *Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books), 2011. Kindle, loc. 758-762.

Those individuals who invited their family, friends, or co-workers for a cup a coffee did not work at Starbucks. It is doubtful they own stock in the corporation. What was clear to those invited, however, was that the ones offering the invitation believed the local Starbucks coffeehouse provided space to connect in fellowship as well as to have a cup a coffee. It is no different for the church as Platt states, “So here we sit, with the gospel of God in our hearts, with the gift of God known as the church, and with a grand and gracious invitation from God to lock arms with one another in the passionate spread of his glory to the ends of the earth.”<sup>60</sup> An invitation offered to the local community through Christian hospitality provides a connection that demonstrates the worth and importance of those outside the church to those inside the church.

### *Space*

The second theme for application to the church that emerged in conversation with the customers of Starbucks was the understanding that Starbucks offers space for the customer to engage in fellowship. With few exceptions, when accepting the initial invitation for coffee, the encounters took place in a local Starbucks coffeehouse. One customer reflected on his first encounter at Starbucks, “I remember sitting in a leather chair across from my friend. I thought as I was drinking my coffee next to a fireplace—this feels like home.”<sup>61</sup> By providing comfortable furniture, patio seating, tables to do various tasks from reading the paper to filling out an expense report, and free Wi-Fi, the Starbucks Corporation offers space for the customer to enjoy fellowship or sit by himself as he drinks his coffee and reads the morning newspaper.

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<sup>60</sup> Platt, loc. 1565-1567.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Starbucks Customers. March 16, 2014.

Newer Starbucks coffeehouses intentionally reflect the neighboring culture. Some of the interviews that took place with Starbucks customers happened in a coffeehouse a mile away from a major college campus. The interior of the coffeehouse reflects its location with multiple workstations for college students. J.R. Woodward, a church planter, points out this purposeful practice of hospitality, “creates a space of mutual exchange between guest and host. According to Woodward, the Greek word for hospitality in the New Testament can be translated as both ‘host’ and ‘guest.’”<sup>62</sup> The space offered for hospitality by Starbucks is more than just a comfortable place to sit and drink coffee.

The space created reflects an even deeper possibility whether for the Starbucks customer or the churchgoer to explore oneself and one’s relationship with other individuals. This space is made more important in a capitalistic society as pointed out by Oldenburg were the “purpose is to remind the ideological marketplace that a deep and sacred reality is present for all of us in our ordinary daily experiences, and we need to make time and space for it, if it’s to become part of the healing process that we and society must undergo.”<sup>63</sup> This space for the church can be both spiritual and physical as witnessed in The Assurance of Pardon after sins have been confessed and through the physical touch of a handshake or hug during The Passing of the Peace.

Tim Keller, lead pastor at Redeemer Church in New York City, gives insight to this possibility as “the middle space between doctrine and practice—the space where we

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<sup>62</sup> J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP Books), 2012. Kindle loc. 3707-3708.

<sup>63</sup> Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place*, 60.

reflect deeply on our theology and our culture....”<sup>64</sup> The space provided at the coffeehouse affords freedom to explore relational conversation without necessarily bumping up against the barriers established to control the conversation or to develop the makeup of the community. Peck points out, “The great enemy of community is exclusivity. Groups that exclude others because they are poor or doubters or divorced or sinners or of some different race or nationality are no communities; they are cliques—actually defensive bastions against community.”<sup>65</sup> Whether one walks into Starbucks for the first time or for the hundredth time, he or she is greeted with, “Welcome to Starbucks.” There are no assigned seats. Space is available for anyone and everyone who is looking for the possibility of fellowship.

Hayner points out that for the church, the heart of Christian hospitality is the understanding of providing space both within and beyond the church walls, thus allowing people to engage with the divine through worship and community.<sup>66</sup> The challenge of hospitality is the willingness of believers to take down the barriers placed in the space of the church and in the lives of the believers that limit those outside the Body of Christ to move towards Jesus.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Timothy J Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2012. Kindle loc. 211-212.

<sup>65</sup> Peck. 61.

<sup>66</sup> Hayner.

<sup>67</sup> McNeal, 59. McNeal points out the problem with barriers within the church that stand against the community: “people come to church, expecting to find God, [but] they often encounter a religious club holding a meeting where God is conspicuously absent.”

Barriers, as defined by Hayner, are the unknown obstacles (spiritual or physical) that cause the visitor to fear doing something wrong (like sitting in someone's pew).<sup>68</sup> Examples of physical barriers include hard to follow worship services that employ tribal language, that is, language fully known to the church member but foreign to the visitor; and tribal knowledge, a lack of signage pointing visitors to various areas in the church building. Spiritual barriers are covert and harder to define because they are the beliefs visitors often go away with, feeling they are unworthy enough to enter the sacred space of the church. Barriers draw lines in the sand as if there is a difference between sacred space and secular space.

David Kinnaman of the Barna Research Group points to barriers within the church and its believers when he writes, "A generation of young Christians believe that the churches in which they were raised are not safe and hospitable places to express doubts. Many feel that they have been offered slick or half-baked answers to their thorny, honest questions, and they are rejecting the "talking heads" and "talking points" they see among the older generations."<sup>69</sup> Kinnaman's example is one illustration of how a church places barriers in sacred space that obstruct even a believer from experiencing the divine.

It is through taking down these barriers that the church and its believers show the local community how far the church is willing to go to live out Christian hospitality. This inclusivity is what Bishop Cary Graham meant when he said, "The price is that the church must always be willing to die to its own cultural comfort in order to live where

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<sup>68</sup> Hayner.

<sup>69</sup> David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church--and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle, loc. 105-107.

God intends it to be.”<sup>70</sup> It is the willingness to deny oneself for the purpose of creating space for others.

Hayner shared an example of this daring hospitality when he was the President of The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, a college ministry comprised largely of students. A local chapter set up a tent on their campus with signs that read, “Free Prayers.” There was no overt effort to recruit new members. Those in the local chapter were amazed by the number of students who might have never come to a nightly gathering for worship or Bible study, and yet these students came forward and said, “I will let you pray for me.” Hayner points out the local chapter did not turn its back on the Christian faith, but instead, these students presented the Christian faith (via the act of prayer) in a very inviting, non-threatening way, thus providing a space (in the tent) that was open to everyone.<sup>71</sup>

### *Connection*

In offering space, the local Starbucks coffeehouse is a place of connection—whether that connection is born in the invitation being offered to have coffee with a friend, the barista making a latte, or simply being in the presence of other people. In the midst of his own personal, economical collapse, author Michael Gill proclaimed, “My Starbucks store became a refuge for me in a turbulent, emotional time. My store on old Broadway was a little like an island of warm welcome in the larger island of Manhattan, where I was learning to survive and to make new connections. In a very real sense it had

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<sup>70</sup> Cary Graham, “Fresh Expression.” Lecture, Fresh Expression Conference. (Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, VA, December 2-3, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Hayner.

become my new home for the holidays.”<sup>72</sup> As Gill was losing the connection of a failed business career, he was establishing new connections with those he encountered daily, first as a customer and eventually when he became a barista at Starbucks.

With space being offered by Starbucks, connections such as Gill’s happen organically. It is what theologian Kester Brewin, describes, “as all of these people and transactions interconnected through a dense web of horizontal connections, not needing to route everything up through to some queen ant controller or mayor before being given permission to act.”<sup>73</sup> Horizontal connections happen at Starbucks when the customer feels comfortable enough to not only to say hello to the person sitting next to him, but to actually strike up a conversation with that person.

One customer the researcher interviewed shared how for months he had come to his local Starbucks for a cup of coffee and to read his paper. One day a stranger set next to him and asked if he could read his sports page. From that brief encounter, the two men developed a relationship where they now meet for coffee every week. As a matter of fact, their connection has expanded to include several more regulars whom they welcomed to join them in reading the paper and drinking coffee.<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, the more frequent the customer and the more time spent in Starbucks, the deeper the connection between both employees and other customers. Not only do baristas and customers know each other by name, but customers who were once strangers are now acquaintances and expect

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<sup>72</sup> Michael Gill, *How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live like Everyone Else* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007), Kindle, loc. 2486-2488.

<sup>73</sup> Kester Brewin, *Signs of Emergence: A Vision for Church That Is Organic/networked/decentralized/bottom-Up/communal/flexible/always Evolving* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 78.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Starbucks Customers. March 8, 2014.

to see each other. It is for this reason Keller points out, “Strong community is formed by powerful common experiences, as when people survive a flood or fight together in a battle.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, community is being formed connectionally over a cup of coffee.

The seeming casual connection forged over coffee can also be seen in a deeper understanding of being wanted and needed, especially in local communities where people often feel broken and separated. Frost and Hirsch flesh out the desire of being wanted and needed as they describe the community built around The Burning Man Festival in Nevada:

Belonging: Says the official Burning Man website, You belong here and you participate. You’re not the weirdest kid in the classroom—there’s always somebody there who’s thought up something you never even considered. You’re there to breathe art. Imagine an ice sculpture emitting glacial music—in the desert. Imagine the Man, greeting you, neon and benevolence, watching over the community. You’re here to build a community that needs you and relies on you.<sup>76</sup>

With the pressure of daily demands and constraints, it is liberating for the customers of Starbucks to hear, “What can I make for you today?” Connections happen when both parties matter to each other, drawing strength and comfort from each other where there is a real sense of belonging: you belong to me and I belong to you and we all belong here. Connections happen when all parties involved are appreciated and honored.

For Hayner, the church and its leaders must understand that hospitality is for the sole purpose of connection: for the church to connect with the world and for the world to connect to the church and for both to connect with Jesus.<sup>77</sup> This understanding of hospitality moves beyond the worn out notion held by many in the church: that Christian

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<sup>75</sup> Keller, loc. 9316-9317.

<sup>76</sup> Frost and Hirsch, loc. 192-197.

<sup>77</sup> Hayner.



hospitality is somehow offered among believers or that hospitality is a poorly conceived ploy to add unsuspecting outsiders to the church role. In exploring the possibility of “third place”, Oldenburg writes, “Whenever you go to a place where people know and like you, you open yourself to others who are there...Customers run into people they know and pass information back and forth.”<sup>78</sup> Understanding connection as a direct result of Christian hospitality, the church is free to claim its ancient birthright of making disciples as opposed to finding good Methodists or Presbyterians in the community.

### *Ownership*

The last major theme identified by the Starbucks customers is ownership. All ten interviewees stated their loyalty to their local coffeehouse with Starbucks being their brand. As mentioned previously, the development of ownership is an intentional byproduct of the Starbucks Corporations. Ownership, whereby the customer and barista “own” the experience, is the last of “The Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service.” As Cory Long pointed out in his interview, “We want every customer that drinks our coffee to feel as if they are part of a unique experience.”<sup>79</sup> Through ownership, Starbucks produces not only brand loyalty, but a circular form of evangelism where now those who were once invited to have coffee, are now inviting others to coffee. The same applies to the church. Hirsch points out this reality: “The communicator and recruiter to the organizational cause... markets the idea or product and gains loyalty and allegiance to a

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<sup>78</sup> Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Long.

brand.”<sup>80</sup> This circular form of evangelism developed in the customers is a free and effective form of advertisement.

Developing evangelism through hospitality helps “cultivate a welcoming environment by equipping the community to practice hospitality as a way of life and share God’s story with others in the right spirit at the proper time.”<sup>81</sup> While speaking to the church about hospitality and evangelism, Woodward’s thought could easily apply to the capitalistic evangelism being developed by Starbucks through its Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service. It is through this form of intentional, customer ownership that Starbucks has developed a loyal following. Jack Hough reports in *Barron’s Online* that for the first time The Starbucks Corporation has caught up to McDonald’s in overall market value in the United States.<sup>82</sup> As one customer shared, “When I was growing up traveling with my family we would always look for a McDonald’s. Now, when traveling, my son pulls up the Starbucks’ app on my phone so that we can get coffee.”<sup>83</sup> Starbucks is not only with the customer almost everywhere one travels, but the customer is grateful that he does not have to travel without Starbucks.

Ownership is also a driving force behind church affiliation. Frost and Hirsch point out the importance of developing ownership in those the church reaches:

Generosity and hospitality were hallmarks of the Christian movement from the start. And this took the form of costly and radical sharing. As worthwhile as food drives and Christmas baskets might be, much of the church’s generosity is not

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<sup>80</sup> Hirsch and Sweet, loc. 2865-2866.

<sup>81</sup> Woodward, loc. 3699-3702.

<sup>82</sup> Jack Hough, “Starbucks May Leapfrog McDonald’s in Market Value.” - *Barron’s*. March 20, 2013. <http://online.barrons.com/news/articles/SB50001424053111903601104579451241083847428>, accessed April 17, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Starbucks Customers.

terribly costly for the believers. Selfless, humble, and gracious hospitality will mark the church as a unique source of salt and light in the community. Clearly the early church, centered as it was on the apostles' teaching about Jesus, saw generosity as an obvious expression of Christlikeness.<sup>84</sup>

Moving from invitation to ownership, the church invites the community to know that they too play an important role in connecting others to Jesus. At one time in American church life, a believer moving from city to city or state to state leaned towards denominational branding when looking for a new church; however, through the introduction of outward Christian hospitality, many believers care less and less about denominational loyalty and more about the substance of the church's outreach to its local neighborhood. This transition has produced a branding and loyalty to the missional church. Keller shines light on this new reality: "The fact remains that a large number of Christian believers today are on an earnest search for the missional church."<sup>85</sup> More and more, when moving to a new town and looking for a new church home, what the believer, whose faith has been developed through Christian hospitality, wants to know is not if a particular church is Lutheran or Baptist, but does the particular church live out its faith beyond its church walls. What more and more believers want to know is if the church practices Christian hospitality within the local community that surrounds it.

### **Conclusion**

By no means is the researcher claiming that Starbucks has all the answers to reversing the mainline and evangelical churches' decline and disconnect to their communities. However, there is indication that Starbucks tries to learn and improve the

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<sup>84</sup> Frost and Hirsch, loc. 1686-1689.

<sup>85</sup> Keller, loc. 7471-7472.

way it serves its customers by employing The Four Pillars for World Class Service. Furthermore, through the establishment of intentional hospitality found in The Four Pillars, the Starbucks Corporation has empowered its local coffeehouses along with its employees to develop loyal customer bases. What faithful customers or first-timers experience when they see, hear, and smell as they walk into Starbucks is purposely placed before them in an open act to connect people to a shared story and a community. As Woodward states, “The practice of hospitality creates a space of mutual exchange between guest and host, where ‘guest’ and ‘host’ are interchangeable.”<sup>86</sup>

The fruits of the Starbucks Corporation’s intentional practices are evidenced in the interview data gathered and analyzed by the researcher. Four themes emerged from the data: invitation, space, connection, and ownership. The customer perceived the invitation due to the barista’s anticipation of the customer’s desires. The customer’s perception of space is not only the physical space available in the coffeehouse, but the psychological space between the barista and the customer is anticipated by the barista. One of the four pillars is the idea of connecting to the customers and the customers report that they have a feeling of connection to their chosen Starbucks. It is this connection that gives the customers the idea of ownership. It is easily seen that the Starbucks’ Four Pillars are working as evidenced in the interviews conducted by the researcher.

The question remains, what will make people feel invited, provided space, and connected so that they will have a sense of ownership in a local church? By understanding and adapting the process and practices of hospitality as implemented by Starbucks, the local church has a possible path forward in sharing the story of Jesus to its

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<sup>86</sup> Woodward, loc. 3707-3708.

community in the way that reaches beyond the church walls as it rediscovers and reclaims the power through radical, outward hospitality.

## SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The attached artifact is a fiction book proposal that: (1) through storytelling the author introduces readers to an understanding of outward, Christian hospitality as seen through the local Starbucks coffee house; (2) informs them of the Starbucks' Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service; (3) details how the Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service can be implemented by the local church; (4) discusses the possible implications for the church if portions of the Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service are implemented as means of living out Christian hospitality. Although the notion of outward Christian hospitality is important to understand as individual believers, this particular artifact is best read in a group setting for the purpose of instituting change in how a local congregation reaches out to its neighbors.

As both mainline and evangelical churches continue to decline in both membership and influence in the community, it is important for the local congregation to discover ways to reach out and connect with its community. This form of personal human contact is made even more important upon consideration of the redefinition of community as defined by Facebook and Twitter. Thus many churches are seeking new ways for purposeful renewal. While many books have been written about Starbucks concerning leadership principles and even books discussing Starbucks in connection to the church, to date, few books of fiction have attempted to address Starbucks in connection with outward hospitality and the narrative it produces.

Believing that the church is not divorced from learning from corporate structures, I propose to show how the Starbucks model helps the church understand the connective power of outward hospitality. This artifact will empower the local church and individual

believers to take the first step in reaching out and connecting to the community beyond its church doors.

## SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

*A SIMPLE CUP OF COFFEE*  
*THE NOT SO BIG BOOK*  
*ON HOW STARBUCKS OPENED MY EYES TO CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY*  
John A. Hinkle Jr.

January 1, 2015

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Dear Editor,

My name is John Austin Hinkle, Jr. and I have been ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for over twenty years serving churches of all shapes and sizes. My ministry shows success in helping the local congregation focus on being good stewards of both the resources received by members and a holistic and positive approach to reaching out to the neighboring community. I am currently the Senior Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. First Presbyterian Church, like most mainline churches, has faced the great challenges of an ever-declining denomination in members and financial resources, and yet over the past six years First Presbyterian Church continues to break those trends as the church has grown both in numbers and in spirit.

Over the past three years, I have been working on a book entitled, *A Simple Cup of Coffee: The Not So Big Book on How Starbucks Opened My Eyes to Christian Hospitality*. The topic of Starbucks and how it connects to the church and society is not a new one. Leonard Sweet's *The Gospel According to Starbucks* and Michael Gates Gill's *How Starbucks Saved My Life* do an amazing job reflecting how the Starbucks Coffee House has created social relevance in the way it connects coffee with customer.

*A Simple Cup a Coffee*, in contrast, is meant to offer local congregations a practical application to hospitality using the tools offered by Starbucks. The difference between my book and others that have been written about Starbucks is that my book is written in fictional narrative. Much like Mackenzie Kyle's book, *Making It Happen: A Non-Technical Guide to Project Management*, *A Simple Cup of Coffee* aims to help congregations understand how Starbucks applies hospitality as a form of customer service and how to implement the Starbucks model within a local congregation. The power of *A Simple Cup of Coffee* comes through the information I have gleaned through my two years of researching Starbucks' model of hospitality and the art of storytelling that I have developed throughout my ministry.



Local congregations are looking for answers when it comes to reaching out to the community. Starbucks' manta that it "is not a coffee business serving people, rather, Starbucks is a people business serving coffee" lends much to the church. Reading *A Simple Cup of Coffee* and applying the lessons learned, I believe churches of a wide variety of faith traditions can experience Christian hospitality in ways they never before imagined. Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward having a cup of coffee with you,

John

### **Fiction Book Proposal**

**Title:** *A Simple Cup of Coffee: The Not So Big Book on How Starbucks Opened My Eyes to Christian Hospitality*

**Author:** Rev. John A. Hinkle, Jr.  
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**Hook:** As mainline and evangelical churches continue to decline in both membership and influence within their communities, it is important for local congregations to discover ways to reach out and to connect with their communities. *A Simple Cup of Coffee* illustrates how observing and implementing Starbucks' Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service into the life of the local church, empowers the church to touch people beyond its church doors.

**Purpose:**

- Introduce the reader to an understanding of outward hospitality as observed through the local Starbucks coffeehouse and as illustrated observed in Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service

- Detail the implementation of Starbucks' Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service into the local church
- Discuss the possible implications for the church's mission of living out Christian hospitality both individually and corporately within its neighboring community

**Promotion and Marketing:** Statistically, it is no secret that during the past fifty plus years mainline churches have been in decline both in membership and worship attendance. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, large evangelical churches too are included in this trend of decline. This decline has produced a great sense of loss. Coinciding with this decline, the local church's influence within its community is also waning. Pastors and lay leaders are desperately searching for ways to reconnect with their local communities.

This book does not offer easy answers or step-by-step solutions to this problem of decline and lack of influence. Rather, it is a shared narrative about how outward Christian hospitality is possible in both the life of the church and individual members. When the church and its members live outward hospitality for the sake of its community the church and its members reap the reward of renewal.

Having served as a Presbyterian pastor for the past twenty years, the author has successfully used a fictional narrative to share the power behind hospitality as it is implemented via Starbucks' "Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service." Hinkle expects the book to be promoted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and through the newly formed E.C.O. (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians), on Twitter, Facebook, and through media outlets such as radio and Christian podcasts.

The author has served in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in three states. Rev. John A. Hinkle, Jr. received his Masters of Divinity at Columbia Theological Seminary

and is completing his Doctorate of Ministry at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. He has contact with Steve Hayner, former President of Inter-Varsity Student Ministry and current President of Columbia Theological Seminary and Leonard Sweet, popular author and lecturer.

Interest has been expressed in this book by Heath Rader, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for the purpose of empowering congregations to think beyond their church doors.

**Note:** While 20,000 words of the author's manuscript have been submitted, the author is in process of completing *A Simple Cup of Coffee*.

#### **Competition:**

- *How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live like Everyone Else*. Michael Gill. New York: Gotham Books, 2007. A non-fiction account of how Gill went from corporate executive to barista discovering his soul on the way.
- *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Christine D. Pohl. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999. A theological reflection on the importance of outward Christian hospitality.
- *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, Robert C. Schnase 2007. A step-by-step approach to implementing Christian hospitality in the context of the local church.
- *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*. Leonard I. Sweet, and Edward H. Hammett. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007. An examination of the power behind the intentional branding of Starbucks and the way the coffee house interacts with its customers.

**Uniqueness:** The topic of Starbucks and how it connects to the church and society is not new. Both Leonard Sweet's *The Gospel According to Starbucks* and Michael Gates Gill's *How Starbucks Saved My Life* reflect on how the Starbucks Coffee House has created

social relevance in the way it connects coffee with customer. *A Simple Cup a Coffee* adds to this conversation by offering a local congregation a practical application of hospitality using the tools offered by Starbucks.

The difference between this book and others is that this book is fiction. Much like Mackenzie Kyle's book, *Making It Happen: A Non-Technical Guide to Project Management*, Hinkle's *A Simple Cup of Coffee* uses fictional narrative to help congregations understand how Starbucks applies hospitality as a form of customer service. It is designed to foster dialogue among readers as a way to implement this practice into the life of the church as the church reaches beyond its own church walls. The power behind *A Simple Cup of Coffee* comes through both the research the author has conducted over the last two years and the art of storytelling that developed throughout his ministry.

**Endorsements:**

Steve Hayner, current President of Columbia Theological Seminary; Heath Rader, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and George Stroup, retired Professor of Reformed Theology of Columbia Theological Seminary, have agreed to give their endorsements to the book when a publisher is found.

**Christian Theme:** As mainline and evangelical churches in the United States witness a decline in membership and worship attendance, their influence within their communities erodes. One possible reason for this decline and disconnect is that many churches are stuck in an old paradigm, one where hospitality is something one does for its own

members through activities like delivering dinner to the sick and shut-ins or small groups or “back home” ministries developed for church members.

*A Simple Cup of Coffee* calls on the local church to reclaim the historic and spiritual marks of the church as outward acts of Christian hospitality. Living outwardly, Christian hospitality empowers the local church to reach out to its surrounding community. Outward acts of Christian hospitality allow the church to reflect the love of Jesus into the world.

Starbucks’ “Four Pillars for World Class Customer Service” offers the local church a blueprint towards how to implement Christian hospitality in and beyond the church doors. *A Simple Cup of Coffee* is written to guide the local church in discovering or rediscovering the joy of living out hospitality.

**Intended Readers:**

The primary audience includes:

- Pastors
- New Church Development Pastors
- Seminary Students
- Ruling Elders or lay leaders in local churches
- Sunday School Classes or Back Home Groups

The secondary audience includes:

- Directors of denominational resources
- Seminary students
- All who work in ministries of the church directly connected to fellowship, hospitality, care, evangelism and worship

**Manuscript:** The introduction and the first 25,000 words of the book are complete and ready for review. The completion of the whole manuscript will come with further conversations with local Christian authors. Five additional months will be needed to complete the remainder of the book.

**Author Bio:** John Hinkle, Jr. and his family arrived in Murfreesboro, Tennessee to serve the First Presbyterian Church in July of 2008. John received a B.A. in Religion from Presbyterian College and a Masters of Divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary. He is currently working on his Doctorate of Ministry at George Fox Seminary and University. John was ordained in June of 1994 as the pastor of the Antioch Presbyterian Church in Antioch, North Carolina. Beginning in the year 2000, John was called to be the organizing pastor of the Providence Presbyterian Church (a new church development) in Paulding County, Georgia. Through John's leadership, Providence Presbyterian Church was chartered in 2003 and moved into her new church home on Easter Sunday 2007. John has a passion in ministry to reach those wanting more than what the world has to offer. He believes that the local church is where one can raise questions and discover answers to life's problems and through this process become awakened to the love of Jesus Christ.

John has been on numerous panel discussions at Middle Tennessee State University. He was the featured speaker at the Tennessee Association of Business and Math Educators in 2012. He was even part of a popular podcast *Christian Diatribe* for two years with known artist, Jeff Stuckey.

John has been married for 22 years to Leila Hinkle, a third grade teacher and doctoral student focused on testing and data assessment. They have one son, John Hinkle, III (Tripp) who entered his freshman year at Auburn University in the fall of 2014. During his downtime, John enjoys spending time with his family and discovering the beauty of Middle Tennessee. If you find yourself up at five o'clock in the morning you can find him walking his two English Springer Spaniels: Dooley and Lily.

**Publishing Credits:** Though *A Simple Cup of Coffee* is his debut book, Hinkle has been featured in many news articles in the local paper. He is often asked to speak in front of religious and civic organizations.

**Future Projects:**

*A Place Called Home*

A fictional narrative of the ministry of John Ogilvie, a young Presbyterian minister called to serve the people of the small farm community of Bowmore, North Carolina. This humorous story chronicles the daily situations that arise for John as he ministers to those inside and outside his church. The narrative also focuses on the serious side of ministry dealing with life, death and everything in between as one hold on to his faith.

*Thank Dog (I Mean God)*

This non-fiction work is an autobiographical of John Hinkle's own life as he wrestles with being dyslexic, the failure of the public school system and the heroes who did would not let him quit. Much of the book is focused on the adaptation skills Hinkle developed over time as he learned to not only work through the educational system but thrived in building relationships. *Thank Dog* is meaningful for anyone who has dyslexia or knows someone who does or simply wants to read about overcoming the challenges of life.

*The Quick and the Dead*

While reflecting on the words from The Apostles' Creed, this non-fiction book for ministers focuses on the challenges facing the pastorates in time of death and dying especially when it comes to shaping the funeral or memorial service. Believing that the

funeral service is a celebration of Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection to come *The Quick and the Dead* reminds us of the blessed joy to come.



## SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

This project was born out of an original desire to wrestle with the reasons for decline in mainline denominations and specifically in the faltering reality of The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The project consistently centered on exploring the concept of hospitality as a means for the church to reach its neighboring community via the success of local, artisan restaurants. However, after several conversations with friends and colleagues, I made the decision to investigate the understanding of hospitality as implemented by the Starbucks Corporation through the local coffee house.

The first challenge raised by Dr. Cliff Berger and Dr. Steve Danganan centered around how this current exploration into the local Starbucks would speak with new insight into a subject previously explored by Dr. Leonard Sweet in his book, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*. Embarrassingly enough at the time, I was unaware of Sweet's book. This was quickly rectified. In exploring Sweet's words, I became convinced that the message of hospitality as extended to its customers by Starbucks was even more important to examine in light of the life of the local church. I also considered that while there were multiple books written on Starbucks and on the subject of Christian hospitality, few have tried to bridge the gap between the two.

It is important to point out the value found in the process of researching and writing the four required academic essays during my program. From the start, Dr. Danganan forced me to think and write academically. In the beginning, especially with the first essay, this was a point of frustration. However, the process helped me form and shape the argument that over a simple cup of coffee, the local church can learn something new about hospitality. I have used portions from each semester's academic essay in the

final dissertation. These same essays gave form and structure to the narrative construction of my artifact.

In writing both the dissertation and the artifact, I am grateful for my expert advisor, Dr. Phil Newell, who encouraged me to have fun as I wrote. His words freed me to attempt my first ever-fictional piece of writing, and Phil and Steve pushed me toward seeing this to fruition. With their support, I was able to more freely move from an academic voice to a storytelling voice. It is my hope to expand upon the artifact for eventual publication. I also need to thank Dr. Donna Wallis, who walked me through the editing process with great pastoral care.

I faced two big challenges in the past three years of writing the academic essays, the dissertation and the artifact. Having dyslexia, I have always struggled with both reading and writing. Since first grade, every academic endeavor has been an obstacle for me. In truth, once I graduated from seminary, I never thought I would seek a Doctor of Ministry degree. Yet, through the encouragement of family and friends, I took a chance. I am blessed by that decision. My second challenge was simply life itself. Of course in all things, life often gets in the way of our well-laid plans. However, each time I thought I might be overwhelmed by the demands of my calendar, the staff of George Fox Seminary, especially Doctors Loren Kerns, Andy Campbell and Cliff Berger rallied around me and showed me a path forward. I learned that most often my biggest problem was overthinking the solution.

Finally, I am grateful for the wisdom and grace of Dr. Leonard Sweet who reminded me of the old cliché, “A picture is worth more than a thousand words”. Our required reading and the Advances spoke to me about the challenges the church faces in

the endeavor to reach out to its zip code in the face of the decline of Christendom. It is through grace that the church is empowered to live out a life of radical hospitality. Thank you, Len, for reminding me the faithful life is in the water and the wind.

APPENDIX A:  
A SIMPLE CUP OF COFFEE:  
THE NOT SO BIG BOOK ON HOW STARBUCKS OPENED MY EYES TO  
CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

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**Introduction: Same Morning... Two Different Views**

A young couple awoke one Sunday morning and decided that this was the day to try a new church. Both husband and wife were baptized in the church. The wife was active in her church's youth group growing up. The husband's family attended church on Easter and Christmas only. They even got married in her childhood church, but after their wedding, they thought they had no reason to go back to church. They worked hard on the weekdays and they loved to sleep in and play on the weekends, but with the birth of their daughter, now thirteen months old, they came to the conclusion that they wanted more for their child than what the world could offer.

They decided to visit the Presbyterian Church in town, in part, because the wife's family had been Presbyterians for generations, but mostly because they had often admired the beautiful exterior and stained glass as they passed by the sanctuary going to work. Running late that Sunday morning, the young couple had to figure out where to park since the church was located downtown and there were very few parking spaces next to the church.

Once they parked, they rushed towards what they thought was the sanctuary with no signage pointing the way. Unable to get through a few locked doors, they finally entered through the right door into the sanctuary. The ushers were nice enough, showing them where to sit, but no one told them about the nursery for their daughter. Sitting in a sea of gray hair, it was clear to this young couple that this particular congregation was aging quickly.

When worship was over, people smiled, and they felt sure the pastor would have shaken their hands if they had waited in the line to talk with him. However, the truth was

no one introduced him or herself. No one said, “welcome” or “please come back.”

After church, the couple decided to go to their Starbucks. The minute they walked into the coffeehouse the barista warmly said, “Welcome Johnson family. Two Latte Grandes?”

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I have only been the pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Bakersfield for a couple of months, but already Sunday is becoming a familiar routine. We worship twice on Sunday: 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., which means that I am usually at the church no later than 6:30 a.m. Before anyone else arrives I go over my sermon at least twice. I walk through the building to make sure the custodians put everything in its place on the previous Friday. By the time I am through with my inspection, the Associate Pastors arrive around 7:30 a.m.

From 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., I spend that time going on the internet to see if some big time event happened while I was sleeping. Around 8 a.m. I step out of my office to greet the early arriving church members and to make sure the ushers are in place and ready to go. By 8:20 a.m., I pray with the early morning choir, which is made up of a few paid college students and members of the congregation who like to sing, but do not like to go to choir practice on Wednesday nights. At precisely 8:30 a.m., I am walking in the sanctuary with the associates greeting the congregation. The early service has fewer in attendance for the simple fact that most people like sleeping in. It is for this reason that I have come to see the 8:30 service as a dress rehearsal for the larger and later 11:00 a.m. service.

Following the early morning service, I greet those who tend not to stay for

Sunday School, especially tracking down any visitors who might have shown up. For a few minutes, I make sure the ushers pick up discarded bulletins and straighten up for the next service. I head back to my office and disrobe. From that point forward, while Sunday School is going on, I usually meet with folks who cannot meet during the weekday or wander the church visiting with those church members who do not like to go to Sunday School, but feel it is important for their children to attend. By 10:30 a.m., I am getting ready for worship again, back in the office robing up, back with the much larger chancel choir made up of people who do not mind practicing on Wednesday night. By 11:00 a.m. I am once again in the sanctuary with my associate pastors greeting the congregation. Pretty routine.

However, on this particular Sunday at the 11 a.m. service, I found myself focused less on worship and more on what was going on during worship. While one of my associates was leading the call to worship, I saw them – a young couple who could be no older than early thirties. In the man's arms was a child and I would say the little girl (I say girl because she was dressed in pink) was no more than 12 months old. I could tell when they walked in that they were fatigued and not really sure what to do next.

The usher who met them at the door was helpful enough in that he handed the wife a bulletin, but his simple gesture seemed to be the only interaction he had with the couple. As a matter of fact, the couple just stood there for what seemed like forever trying to figure out where to sit. Frustratingly enough, no one seemed to point out to them where they could find the nursery. Finally, finding an empty pew, the three of them took their seats. Throughout the service, it seemed to me that the wife knew what she was doing: when to sit, when to stand, when to pray, but in the mean time the husband was always



two steps behind. Their daughter was well-behaved, but became a little talkative which earned them a few stares from some of the faithful of the church. I just prayed that the visiting couple would fail to notice, but I thought to myself... *if it was me, I would notice people staring.*

When the service was over, I moved toward the back of the sanctuary and out the front door to greet the worshipers, but I had one goal in mind: I wanted to say hello to this young family. After the choir sang the choral benediction, I stood outside the sanctuary on the sidewalk. Yet, before I could get to them, being blocked by well-wishers, the couple made a beeline for their car across the street. I also noticed that no one from the church even made an attempt to say hello or invite them to come back. They left the church in the same manner they came into the church. As they pulled away, I waved and wondered if I would ever see them again. I had to wonder where they were going.

*The town of Bakersfield is fictitious, but the rest of the story... is gospel.*

## **Chapter 1: The Arrival**

My wife and I, along with our son Tripp, arrived in town in early July. We wanted to move in the summer so that Elizabeth could secure a job teaching in the school system and so that Tripp could get settled in his new environment. Plus, the summer seems to be a little more relaxed for life in the local church: less going on, more people on vacation.

The new call was going to be a change for me. It was the first time where I was actually going to be the Senior Pastor leading a staff that included two other associate pastors. During my first call, I served a small farm community and was everything from pastor to janitor to being my own administrative assistant. My second call, I served as an associate pastor for mission in a very large congregation with an impressive sized staff. Most of my time was spent either leading mission teams on projects internationally or I worked with various missional endeavors around the city. I enjoyed my time serving in this effort, but for the most part I was so focused on “mission” I did not pay attention to much of anything else. I certainly did not get to preach with three other associates waiting their turn for the Senior Pastor to go on vacation. I knew in accepting the call to First Presbyterian Church in Bakersfield that not only would I get to preach every Sunday, but I would be asked to cast a vision for the future for the congregation.

First Presbyterian Church is located in the heart of Bakersfield, a once sleepy southern town now growing because of its closeness to a state capital. If Bakersfield was growing, the church was not. Being located in the downtown area, First Presbyterian Church always had a place of importance in the life of the community. Many of the past saints not only gave leadership to the church, but also were former mayors, councilmen and business leaders of their day. While the members of the church are still active in the

community, the church's influence seemed less and less. In fact, over the recent years, even with the new growth in the community, the church struggled to bring in more members than it was burying. Funerals seemed to be a more common occurrence than baptisms. It is for this reason the search committee said they were looking for a minister who could "rejuvenate" the congregation. The committee wanted to call me because having worked with a large church staff, they thought my previous experience could translate into growing the membership for their congregation. Not wanting to disappoint, I told the committee that I had a clear understanding of how to bring about renewal, when the truth was I was not sure what to do. It helped the committee make their decision that my parents named me after John Knox. Knox – a name only a Presbyterian could appreciate.

I am no fool. I can read what is going on in mainline denominations like mine. First Presbyterian Church is simply a reflection of a denomination in decline. The good news for First Presbyterian Church is it seems to be keeping its head above water, but for how long is anyone's guess. Long gone are the days when people joined your church because it was Presbyterian, and he or she was always Presbyterian. To make matters worse, leadership within the church feels as if they now have to compete not only with large mega churches, but with Sunday soccer tournaments or people spending time at their lake homes on the weekend.

You talk to most anyone at First Presbyterian Church and there is not a member in the church that would tell you that he or she would not want to bring in new members. I get a feeling; however, what they are really saying is that they want to go back to a time when they felt as if the church held a place of importance in the community; when church

growth was as simple as putting an advertisement in the back of the yellow pages. They are looking for me to somehow make this happen. If such a change could happen because of the friendliness of a congregation, then this change might take place sooner than I had hoped.

My family quickly fell in love with First Presbyterian Church. That is not to say the church did not have its quirks and issues, but all churches are made up of a mixture of people simply trying to figure out how to live a faithful life. Yet the minute we arrived, the church embraced my family. The church even held a “pounding.” A pounding is when you load up the new minister with a pound of sugar and a pound of salt, pound of this and a pound of that. The congregation made sure that we had plenty of food for the first two months in our cupboard and members frequently brought us dinner during that time.

The truth is, the hospitality shown to us is witnessed daily in the life of most of the members of the church. If anyone is sick and in the hospital, if anyone births a new baby, if anyone in the church is in need, the rest of the congregation is there for them. On top of that, I am blessed with an amazing Care Ministry Team that was already in place before I arrived. It is made up of twenty prayerful souls who are ready to jump into action when needed, and with an aging congregation, there is always a need.

By the time August rolled around, we were settling in as a family, with Elizabeth teaching third grade and Tripp entering middle school. For me, the honeymoon was still in full swing as the church and its members appreciated most everything I did for them. The staff and I were getting to know each other with most of them happy to hear that “the new guy” wasn’t going to make wholesale changes.

With boxes unpacked and my books on the shelves, I picked up on an undercurrent of concerns from both staff and members: what does the future hold? Most of the growth happening in Bakersfield was in the suburbs. As a matter of fact, the Methodist Church next to us sold their building to a bank and moved out to the suburbs. Many members of First Presbyterian Church were wondering if we were going to do the same thing. No one was going to build a new subdivision next to the church, so if the church was going to grow, it had to rethink its approach to reaching out to the existing community. Granted, few people were going to visit our congregation because it was Presbyterian, but it was probably true that someone might visit our church because of its beautiful sanctuary. Still, the church's beauty would only go so far.

Something had to change. I just wasn't sure what. I knew the church was looking to me for direction. This was made clear when after leading a funeral for a dear member. After the service was over one of the Elders in the church put his arm around me and said in the middle of a large gathering in our fellowship hall, "It is going to be hard to replace Jerry." I had the feeling the Elder meant this in two ways. First, losing Jerry was one less person in worship, and maybe more importantly for this Elder who happened to be in charge of Stewardship, it was going to be hard to replace Jerry's *giving*. The church was looking to me for answers. The only problem was: I was searching for the same answers.

Reflecting on the previous chapter, answer or discuss the following questions:

1. How has your church changed over the past fifty years? Twenty years? Ten Years?
2. List five challenges your congregation faces at this very moment? What are five challenges your congregation will face in the future?

3. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, how would you rate your level of optimism for the future of your congregation?
4. Where are you looking for answers when it comes to direction for the future of your congregation?

## Chapter 2: A Cup of Coffee

I was first introduced to Starbucks when I entered seminary.<sup>1</sup> Having gone to a small liberal arts college in South Carolina, the notion of Starbucks seemed strange, but exotic. When I first entered with my classmate, I was hit with the aroma of strong coffee being made. I was not sure what to get my first visit, and so I asked my classmate what he was getting: “a café latte grandee.” Even the language being used seemed foreign, while hip at the same time. So that is what I ordered my first time at Starbucks: a café latte grandee. Later I would learn I could just order a cup of coffee, which cost way less than a café latte; however, I still order a latte on special occasions.

Starbucks, in many ways, has become my place. Elizabeth and I would often go there for a date night, especially in those first years of ministry when we did not have much money. Often I take my son Tripp to Starbucks on a Saturday morning. I get my cup of coffee and he, a hot chocolate. From time to time, I even take my English Springer Spaniel, Dooley, that Elizabeth and I rescued when he was a young puppy.<sup>2</sup> The barista gives him a little whipped cream as a treat. On my many visits, over the years, Starbucks seemed to change with its customers. Even though a large corporation owns each coffeehouse, every coffeehouse seems to have their own local identity.

Living in a large metropolitan area during my last call, Starbucks almost became my second office. It was a place where I could meet people for pastoral visits and church meetings or just a place where I drank my coffee and read the newspaper before heading to work in the morning. I went to Starbucks so much that finally one of the baristas asked

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.starbucks.com>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.springerrescue.org>

me why I wasn't a Gold Card member.<sup>3</sup> Great question. Starbucks has a reward system that earns you points for free coffee and other coffee related items. I remember how important I felt when my Gold Card finally arrived in the mail. Even though I can now use my iPhone app to buy my coffee, I still find it a thrill to pull out my Gold Card from my wallet.<sup>4</sup>

There is something about walking into a Starbucks that just feels right. Over time I started looking for a Starbucks when I was traveling. It would be the first place I'd go once I checked into an airport or the first place I'd search for when I arrived at my hotel. Even if the hotel "said" they "served" Starbucks coffee, I felt that was a cheap substitute for the real thing and continue looking for an actual location.<sup>5</sup> Even when traveling on the highway, I pull out my phone to find how many Starbucks I will pass before reaching my destination. But nothing could beat *my* Starbucks, the coffeehouse near my last church. They knew me. They knew my order, but more importantly they knew me by name. I would later learn that was not by chance.

Of course, the first thing I did when I arrived in Bakersfield was look for the Starbucks that was between my house and the church. I remember the first day I walked into the coffeehouse. There was a familiarity to it where if I closed my eyes I could point out where the bathrooms were located, where the baristas made the coffee, where people were sitting, drinking their coffee, and reading the newspaper. My arrival was in the morning. Those already there were mainly commuters getting one more taste of caffeine

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.starbucks.com/card/rewards/gold>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.starbucks.com/coffeehouse/mobile-apps/mystarbucks>

<sup>5</sup> Thus my quote from Leonard Sweet in the beginning of the book, "It is in the water and the wind." Just because someone says, they are serving Starbucks coffee does not make it Starbucks.



before they had to face the morning traffic. Standing in line to order, I could tell most of these customers were old pros. Unlike when I visited Starbucks for the first time, these customers knew what they wanted. Now, so did I. A young man in his early thirties greeted me wearing his green apron. Before being asked what I wanted, I blurted out, “I would like a tall, café latte with skim milk.”

“Of course,” said the barista.

The barista took my Gold Card and then asked me the all-important question, “May I have your name?”

“Knox,” I told him. Of course I knew his name was Eric because of his nametag on the green apron.

“Knox, we will get that order out to you as soon as possible.”

From that morning forward, traveling between home and church, I stopped by *my* new Starbucks. I also started the familiar pattern of meeting church members for coffee. Most of the members were used to seeing his or her past minister behind the office desk or the pulpit, so meeting for coffee seemed freeing. I found Starbucks to be a great space to talk, and enjoyed buying people coffee especially if this was his or her first time to visit. And if it was a first visit, I always appreciated when a member went out on a limb and chose something other than just coffee.

This new Starbucks was also where I began to meet with the staff of the church for our monthly planning meeting. Starbucks provided us a place to go just to get away from the office. Without fail, Eric, the barista, was somewhere near. I quickly picked up that he not only remembered my name, but he knew my order. “Morning Knox, what’s it

going to be: a latte or Pike brew?” The more he called out my name the more I thought I needed to call him by his name: “Eric.”

Over time Eric and I started learning more about each other with each morning’s interaction. He quickly discovered that I was the minister at First Presbyterian Church, and I found out that he started working at Starbucks right out of high school, and over the past 10 years, Eric had become the manager of this particular coffeehouse. It was also clear: that Eric loved Starbucks. “Starbucks changed my life,” he once told me. Not wanting to scare him, I thought to myself, *That sure sounds like the gospel story.* “I once was lost but now I am found, blind, but now I see.”

Reflecting on the previous chapter, answer or discuss the following questions:

1. When was the first time you heard about Starbucks?
2. How many times a week do you visit Starbucks? In those times, have you gotten to know some of the baristas by name?
3. In your own experience, what makes Starbucks unique?
4. What is your favorite drink when you go to Starbucks?

### Chapter 3 – The Conversation

One particular morning stands out. I remember reading my paper and drinking my coffee, wrestling with the challenges facing my new call at First Presbyterian Church when I looked up and saw Eric standing near me as he was straightening up after the morning rush. Not wanting to pry, he sheepishly asked, “Got a lot on your mind? Everything okay?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Well, I could not help but hear you mumbling to yourself as you read the paper. I figured either you were frustrated with what you were reading or you were wrestling with something else. Either way I figured you got a lot on your mind.”

“Is it that obvious?” I laughed.

Eric smiled, “It is only obvious because you come in here most mornings mumbling.”

“Well since you asked.” I thought he might be sorry that he even approached me, “I am really struggling at work.”

“You mean at church,” Eric reminded me that he knew I was a minister.

“Yeah that’s right – at church. It is a great church and the people have been nothing but wonderful to my family and me. The church is amazing in the way they love each other... always taking care of each other. And every Sunday as I stand before them I look out and I think – you know the world really longs for what these people have: a sense of belonging, a place to be loved.”

Eric interrupted me. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

“It is a great thing,” I said, “but over the years the church has had a difficult time reaching beyond its doors. And the problem is... the congregation called me here to *grow* the church by bringing in new members, because the last several years the church has been stagnate in growth at best. So over the past several months, I’ve been trying to figure out how this is going to happen.” With such a statement, I thought my barista was really going to regret asking how I was doing.

“Oh, I get it,” Eric reassured me, “in many ways the church and this Starbucks are a lot a like.”

“I am not sure I follow,” I said. “How is selling coffee and the church alike?”

“Well I don’t think selling coffee is what we do,” Eric said. “Don’t get me wrong we sell coffee, but I think we are doing something more. We are telling our story.” Seeing that I was more confused than ever, Eric went on. “You believe in the message of the church.” I nodded. “And I assume your members believe that same message and both you and your members believe that your message can change the lives of those in the community?” Seeing that I was following along, Eric came out and said, “If everything you say about your church is right, then maybe you need to stop thinking about how you will bring the community into your church and start thinking about how your church *connects with* the community.”

I was still thinking to myself, *How in the world does this guy who makes coffee all day know about the church? I am not even sure he goes to church.* (Of course reflecting back, I must admit I never even invited him to my church before this conversation.) Not wanting to hurt his feelings, I politely said, “You have given me a lot to think about,” thinking it would be the end of this conversation,

But much to my surprise, he said, “Come back tomorrow—there is something I want to share with you.”

Reflecting on the previous chapter, answer or discuss the following questions:

1. Share how the Starbucks and the church are alike? Share how they are different?
2. What do you think Eric meant when he said, “We are telling our story”? What is Starbucks’ story?
3. What is the story of your church?

## *Four Napkins – a Culture of Hospitality*

### **Chapter 4: The First Napkin – Anticipate**

Well, what else was I going to do? The next morning I found myself at Starbucks. I ordered my coffee: tall, Pike, room for cream. I sat down at a table and started reading my paper. Within minutes Eric was sitting across from me. He jumped right to where we left off yesterday, “I want to talk with you about something we do here at Starbucks.” Eric paused and like pressing the delete button on his computer he said, “that is not quite right... it is not so much that we do ‘it’, but it is how we do ‘it,’ and the ‘it’ is how Starbucks connects with its community—how we serve those who walk through our doors. If you have a couple minutes, I want to talk with you about Starbucks’ Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service.”

I will admit he caught my interest, “So you are going to reveal to me Starbucks’ secret in how they have become the biggest coffeehouse in the world? Great, but are you sure? Can’t you get fired for this?”

Eric laughed, “I am sure I could get fired if what I am about to say is a big company secret, but The Four Pillars have been around for years in some various form or another. This is not a method... meaning you just can’t follow the instructions and you will be successful. The Four Pillars are intertwined to each other and are simply a foundation to living a life of hospitality with those who walk through our doors or as I think you might put it ‘to do unto others...’”

Seeing my reaction Eric said, “Don’t be so surprised – a lot of you ministers hang out here at Starbucks. After a while, we pick up a thing or two.” He laughed. “Now

before we begin I would just ask that you wait till we go over all the pillars before you talk with anyone in church about these conversations.”

Without hesitation I said, “Sure!”

Then Eric passed over to me a napkin with the word “Anticipate” written on it. “This is the First Pillar.”

Naively I asked, “What am I supposed to anticipate?”

“That is a great question,” Eric said, “so let me ask you, what are you anticipating on Sunday morning? Better yet what are your members anticipating when they are in their cars heading to church?”

I gave it some thought not wanting Eric to think I was not taking his question seriously, “I guess both the members of my church and me are anticipating the same thing: getting ready to worship.”

Eric came back at me, “Is that all?” Sure that a non-believer might not comprehend the depth and width of what it means to worship.

“Is that all... what?” I asked.

“Is that all you are anticipating... getting ready for worship? Shouldn't you be anticipating a whole lot more? Here is what I mean – what do you think we anticipate at Starbucks everyday?”

“Making and selling coffee,” I replied.

“Of course,” Eric smiled, “but who is going to buy our coffee? Who is going to drink it? Who is going to walk through our doors at any given moment? See, The First Pillar reminds every barista who wears the green apron that we need to anticipate the needs of the customers we are going to serve especially our first time customers who may

not know the difference between a cappuccino and a frappuccino. For a customer like you who comes in almost every day... every barista should anticipate not only to call you by name (because you are a regular) but the need to get your coffee quickly. However, with that new customer we need to anticipate her hesitation when she first walks in... not quite sure what to do next. We need to anticipate her questions and maybe give her some solutions. We even need to anticipate if she does not like the coffee she orders and we need to figure out what she might like instead.”

Following along I had to ask, “All of that sounds great, but what does that have to do with the church?”

“Fair enough,” Eric replied. “You said that both you and your members anticipate on any given Sunday preparing yourselves for worship. For worship to happen I assume everyone needs to know his or her role. You personally need to have a sermon to preach. Your organist needs to know what hymns to play. The congregation needs to prepare for their individual roles: some will usher, some will sing in the choir, some will simply sit in the pew. Now I know that this is just scratching the surface in what has to happen to pull off a typical Sunday morning, but in the end, everyone is anticipating the role they play in worship. Fair enough?”

Nodding to confirm that I was following, Eric continued by putting it out there. “Well then, let me ask you this – how is your church anticipating the needs of those who are visiting your congregation for the first time on any given Sunday? I am sure you have a friendly and loving congregation, but even you said yesterday that there seems to be a disconnect between the church and the community. And if that is the case, with such disconnect, do you think it is because just maybe the members of your congregation are



not anticipating the needs of those outside your church? And while I am thinking about it – do you anticipate the needs of your visitors after worship is over?”

As Eric was going over The First Pillar I could not help but think of that young couple who had visited our congregation with their daughter a few Sundays ago. It was clear that the ushers did their job passing out the bulletins, but no one told the couple or better yet showed them where our nursery was located. I also wondered if even one church member noticed that the couple was in the sanctuary or if it even mattered to the other parishioners if the visitors were not present that day. It was also evident that after worship few people in the church if any said hello or even asked their names because they were able to get out of the sanctuary so quickly. Eric asked me my name the first time I ordered coffee from him and from that moment on he never forgot it. So I had to ask this barista, “I’m not sure how familiar you are with church, but do you really think anticipating the needs of someone wanting coffee can be translated into anticipating the needs of a first time visitor?”

“Why not?” asked Eric, “In the end, what we both do is about service and hospitality with a little variation here and there.”

“Well I guess I can work with our Evangelism Team to come up with a check list for our volunteers to work on so that they can anticipate the needs of our visitors,” I said.

“Check lists are fine,” Eric replied, “but remember The Four Pillars are not some mathematical method or formula. Think about it this way... anticipation has less to do with predetermination of future visitors and more to do with interacting with the person in front of you to enhance their experiences not just in worship but in the overall way they view the church. Make sense? Like how after your first few times coming in to

Starbucks I could make recommendations that could enhance your experience. Following me?”

“I think so...” I wavered, “like when an usher sees a new family with a little child they should not assume that they want to take their child to the nursery, but the usher needs to point out that option.”

“That is it,” he said, “but also, think about this – what does your building say about how you anticipate new visitors? What if someone walked into your church with no one there to point the way – would they get lost? Could they find your nursery? Or a changing table?”

“Are you talking about signs?” I asked.

“Sure – signs are important. A lack of signs tells me one or two things. First – you assume everyone knows where everything is or you only care that the members know where everything is. Either way – a lack of directions tells me that you did not anticipate my needs. And how you make announcements in your church during worship... that is a sign too.”

I hate making announcements before worship. First, everything I am telling my members gathered on Sunday has already been posted in the monthly newsletter, is in the weekly electronic newsletter and finally can be found in the bulletin, not to forget our church’s Facebook page. I wonder why people just can’t read. To make matters worse, many of the announcements are handed to me at the last second, as I am about to go into worship.

Eric put his finger on why I hate making announcements when he continued, “When I visit a church most announcements are made in the tribal language of the

church: tribal language is language that only the church and its members can understand. When this is done it does not seem to the visitor that you were anticipating her coming to your church or worse... like I said before, you don't really care if she is there or not – which does not seem very welcoming or hospitable.”

Eric continued, “Here it is... whether it is Starbucks or First Presbyterian Church, by anticipating the visitors’ needs in a positive light, your members are empowered to be organized and forward thinking in their approach in serving anyone who walks through the doors of the church. Isn’t that what the church is suppose to do – serve those in the world?”

“And the best way the church serves the world is through hospitality,” I inserted.

“Okay, I think I am getting this, so what is The Second Pillar?”

“Let’s save that for tomorrow.” He grinned.

Reflecting on the previous chapter, answer or discuss the following questions:

1. Eric said that The Four Pillars laid a foundation to live out hospitality. How do you understand the meaning of hospitality both in the secular world and in the church? How is it different? How is it the same?
2. How do you think the members of your staff anticipate for Sunday worship?
3. How do you as a member of the church anticipate for Sunday worship?
4. How do you think your church anticipates the needs of first visitors to your congregation? In following the conversation between Eric and Knox, what are some ways your church could anticipate the needs of people in your community?
5. How are announcements in your church clear to anyone who hears them? How are they spoken in tribal language?

## Chapter 5: The Second Napkin – Connect

For almost twenty-four hours I kept running through my head the importance of anticipating the needs of the community outside the church. I ruminated over Eric's valuable insight even as I was driving to Starbucks to learn about The Second Pillar. The routine was the same as the day before. I got my coffee and waited for Eric who was serving customers, calling most of them by name. Now I knew he was anticipating their needs before they even asked.

After a few minutes he came over during his break and sat down. "You ready for Pillar Number Two?" He smiled and with that he passed another napkin my way that read "Connect."

He waved at a customer coming in the door, "Hey Bill," then turned to me. "I learned a long time ago that for someone coming to Starbucks the first time is easy... having that person come back the second time is the challenge, and I think that only happens if the barista is anticipating the needs of the customer's moves further by connecting with them. How do your members connect with your community?"

"Well, in worship we have the Passing of the Peace where we ask everyone in worship to stand and greet their neighbors... which, I have to be honest with you, it wasn't easy to get the parishioners to do at first, but now I barely can get the congregation to settle back in." I was proud of the church in the way they reached out to others in worship, but thinking back to the young couple that I couldn't get out of my mind... they came in late missing the Passing of the Peace all together.

"That is great," said Eric. "I have been to some churches where no one said hello to me, so it sounds like your church is open to connecting. Still, the missing link may be

understanding that the connection with people outside your membership has to be purposeful. Connections allow people to know that you care. In other words, connection makes clear that you are just not looking at them as future members who are going to put money in the offering plate.”

“But the church says that is what they are looking to me to do: help them grow,” I said with frustration. “If your pillars are not about growing the church, I’m not sure anyone is going to buy into this.”

Eric laughed, “I didn’t say the visitors wouldn’t join your church, but I would think you want to connect with your community to tell them about Jesus.”

“That is a given,” I said.

“Yes, but any organization has to be careful in what they communicate to those they are serving. It is the very reason I asked and wrote down your name on your coffee cup when you came in,” Eric insisted.

“I thought you wrote names on cups to get our orders straight,” I said.

“That is what a lot of people think, but it is actually easier to just call out the order and let the customers figure out whose order is whose. Instead, we write down name so we can call you by name. I am sure you noticed that eventually I stopped writing down your name – why?”

Figuring it out, I said, “Because you memorized my name!”

“You got it, and thus... I was able to connect with you on a personal level. You no longer were some unknown, unnamed customer. Your name is Knox, which has a cool ring to it, by the way.” Eric went on, “But, something else happens when I called you by your name...”

Clueless again I wondered out loud, “I am not sure what you are talking about?”

Eric pointed out, “You learned my name too. By connecting with you on a most personal level you took the step to connect with me. Soon after I started calling you by name... you quickly learned my name too. That was not by chance.

“I know I have my nametag on, but you were not looking at my nametag. You were looking at me... calling me by name. That only happened because we went deeper in our mutual relationship. What happens for those visitors who are known by the congregation when members call them by name...? I lay money on the next Sunday when that person wakes up and they are thinking about what church to visit or should they even visit another church, they will ponder, ‘Why should I look for another church when I know that there is a church that knows me by name and I know them by name too.’ That person moves from a visitor to an every-Sunday-worshiper and yes, maybe even a member.”

“All because we learned each other’s name.” I said.

“Why not?” replied Eric. “Connections have to begin at the most basic of needs... like learning someone’s name. But something else is going on too. Through the Pillar of Connection, Starbucks offers its customers a connection to a greater community, building fellowship within the coffeehouse itself. While the purchase of a cup of coffee is an individual act between the customer and the barista, the invitation exists and space is made available for relationships to be explored within the coffee house.”

“Keep going.”

“Well, you come in almost five days a week. You order your coffee. You sit and read the newspaper, but that is not all you do. You talk with the other customers. You

connect with them. I have seen you. Eric continued by telling me about a group of older men, I'd noticed who sit in the corner. "They did not start out coming as a group but came as individuals who over time have found each other. And when they see another crusty old man come in a couple of times they invite him to join their group too.

"Look around," Eric moved his arms back and forth to point out the obvious. "This coffeehouse is what we at Starbucks call, 'Third Place.' Third Place is not home, nor your office; rather, the coffee house is a comfortable place to explore relationships. This does not mean that fellowship is forced upon the customer, but space for fellowship is freely offered to explore interconnecting relationships. I have never been to your church, but let me ask you – do you provide Third Place, not only for your members, but for those in the community wanting to connect?"

I had to be honest, "You know I never put much thought into it before." The truth was that as Eric was talking about the power of connection through Third Place, I thought about how we were using space in our church building. Several years ago the church built a large recreational room for sports and church events like Wednesday Suppers or a pick up game of basketball, but on Sunday morning the room is bare. No place to sit, no place to talk; just one big open room. People stand around between worship services, but I wondered what would happen if in that space we put out a few tables with some chairs around them. Could that really make a difference?

"Listen," Eric said, "my break is almost over, but for a few minutes let's just sit here and see how connections are being made."

So the two of us sat there watching and looking. I first focused on the customers walking in with the baristas interacting with them. I could see the differences in how they

connected with their regulars calling them by name, and with the new customers in how they walked them through the menu of coffees. From there I looked around the coffeehouse and saw the large table in the corner with the old men laughing and telling stories. There were a couple of women sharing with each other their daily activities and a father having breakfast with his son. A businessman was on the phone talking with his salesman and a cute, young couple sat across from each other entranced by each other's stare. It was clear that this was not only a place where the barista connects with the customer, but it was also a place where customers felt free to connect with one another.

Eric excused himself to head back behind the counter, but rounding the corner, he turned back and said, "See ya tomorrow, Knox."

*I wouldn't miss it as I was already looking forward to my next cup of coffee.*

1. What was the first connection you made in the church when first visiting? Who was it? How did it happen?
2. How do you as a member of the church try to connect with those who are visiting your church? Is this difficult for you? What are some of the roadblocks in making these connections?
3. Eric speaks about Third Place. Does your church offer a Third Place to make connections happen? What does it look like?



## **Chapter 6: The Third Napkin – Personalize**

While driving to Starbucks the next morning, it was clear that Eric had already given me a lot to think about with just the first two pillars. Even though he asked me not to do anything or speak to anyone in the church until he finished with each pillar, I could not help but think how the implication of the first two pillars would take shape at First Presbyterian Church. I also confess that I was still wrestling with the idea that what Eric was sharing was less of a method or formula for hospitality but that it had more to do with the story of hospitality lived out in the lives of the members of my church.

Truth be told, even though I was excited about what Eric was sharing, I was not really sure how I would present these ideas to the Elders of the church. Several Elders had already questioned why I spent so much time at Starbucks. I chuckle and thought about how I can't wait to stand before those very same Elders and say, "Friends, all our problems are solved thanks to Starbucks." And what about those people who would think that somehow implementing the practices of Starbucks when it comes to hospitality is somehow turning our backs on Jesus... like we are placing our trust more on Starbucks than our Savior? But that issue was the least of my worries, for the simple fact that I have always believed in a God that is active in the world, including Starbucks.

When I walked in the coffeehouse it seemed like the normal crowd. Waiting in line, I could see Eric over at the cash register. I paid closer attention to the time that he spent with each customer. He seemed to have a way with everyone and I couldn't help but smile when he greeted me. "Morning Knox, tall Pike?"

I am not sure why I did it, maybe it was because I wanted to put Eric to the test to see how well he was anticipating my needs, but I threw out there, “You know I am not sure... let’s mix it up. What would you recommend?”

Without hesitation Eric intentionally paused to show he was giving my request some thought and then as if a light came on like in an old cartoons, Eric said, “How about a chai tea latte? I think you will like it. It is perfect for today with a bit of fall in the air. It is a little less harsh than coffee, with a hint of spice; but caffeine-wise, it still packs a punch. If you don’t like it, you can let me know and we will figure something else out.”

“Sounds great... I’ve wanted to try one.”

So, Eric wrote “Knox” on my cup and then introduced me to a new barista. “Hey Kaye, this is Knox. He is a regular, plus the two of us have been working on something; you’ll be seeing a lot of him. He is having his first chai tea latte today, so make it with some extra special love.”

Connection. Kaye nervously grinned as if she was put on the spot, so I said, “Kaye, it is okay. Since I’ve never had one before, I will just assume the way you make it is the way it should always be.”

“Thanks!” she said.

I waited for only a few minutes until Kaye called out my name, “Chai tea latte for Knox,” and for good measure she said, “Tell me what you think.”

I took a sip and then a second. “Not bad,” I said with a wink. I took my chai tea latte and navigated the tables to find a place for Eric and me to have our next conversation. It wasn’t too long before he took his break and came over.

“You were trying to see if I was on my toes this morning,” he said knowingly.

“Was it that obvious?” I laughed.

“Yeah, but that’s okay. Part of what we do. It is how the Four Pillars give us the foundation to interact with the people who come in here day after day. And what about Kaye? She’s great – right?” Eric pointed her out.

“And you asking my name – that was so the next time I come in, Kaye will have a better chance at remembering my name, more important than getting my order right?”

“That is it,” he said, “and all of this moves us to our Third Pillar.” With that he passed me another napkin that read, “Personalize.”

“So how is ‘personalize’ any different from anticipation and connection?” I asked.

“Great question,” Eric replied. “You have to remember The Four Pillars are not a method or a formula in order to produce hospitality, but instead each pillar is a building block to hospitality. Think of it this way – with each pillar we are simply going deeper in the relationship between barista and customer.

“At Starbucks we like to say that we are not in the coffee business, but rather we are in the people business, and we just happen to serve coffee. Therefore, to personalize the experience simply authenticates and improves the customer’s experience in a way that can actually change his demeanor.”

I could tell Eric was excited about this pillar as he went on, “I remember one customer coming in the other day. He was angry and frustrated with something at work as he openly expressed to someone on his cell phone. He ended the call in a huff, only to leave here laughing and smiling and calling that same person back to apologize, because he connected in a positive way with another human being that just happened to serve him coffee.”

Thinking that maybe Eric was taking this a little too far in how much influence Starbucks has on one's life, I pushed back. "Are you telling me that through The Third Pillar of Personalization you can actually change someone's attitude? I find that a little hard to believe."

Eric seemed a little surprised by my response. "Really? That's disappointing considering what you do for a living. Why do people come to church? Why do they worship Sunday after Sunday? Isn't it because they want to see a change in their own lives?"

"Well, sure..." I said, stumbling to find the words.

"And how does that happen? I remember my grandfather who never missed church on Sunday in his life always telling me that a man stands just a little bit straighter on Sunday after he worships. Why would he say this? Because church should be about change." Eric continued, "I would also hope in your sermons you personalize your message in a way that it resonates with those who are listening."

"Yes, I hope I am doing this when I preach," which really was more like a prayer than a hope, but I am sure every minister worries that somehow the message he preaches from the pulpit fails to change the hearts of the hearer.

"I am sure that is what you are doing; and the way you are doing it is by making the message one your people can understand. I mean isn't this the reason Jesus taught in parables?" Eric probed.

"Man, you know a lot about the church," I stated.

"I told you – a lot of ministers come in here and I have a lot conversations."

What Eric said was true. Jesus taught in parables so that he could personalize his teaching. When Jesus talked about having faith as small as a mustard seed – he did so because everyone who was listening that day knew how small a mustard seed was. And Jesus did this because he cared about the people in his midst. So I had to ask, “How does Starbucks personalize the experience for the customer other than knowing someone’s name?”

“Great question,” Eric answered. “Well the most obvious way is believing each customer is unique and different. For example we want the customer to experiment with the types of drinks they might like. You see that nicely dressed woman over there, sitting at a table by herself with her nose deep into her computer? The other day she ordered a raspberry cheesecake latte.<sup>6</sup> She read about it online and thought she would give it a try. I did not have the heart to tell her how many calories it had, but nevertheless on this one day, she explored new possibilities and Starbucks made that happen for her and we will make it happen for you too.

“Now, here is a cool thing,” Eric went on, “Believe it or not Starbucks actually borrows a page from the church. Like the church we too have seasons. There are moments in the year that note change and new beginning.”

“Like Christmas and Easter,” I chimed in, “or the season of Advent and Lent.”

“Right on! Do you know what the biggest day of the year is for Starbucks?”

Seeing that I did not know the answer, Eric did not miss a beat, “It happens every Fall. It

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<sup>6</sup> Here’s the recipe for raspberry cheesecake latte:  
Flan syrup (3 pumps tall, 4 grande, 5 venti)  
Cinnamon Dolce syrup (1.5 pumps tall, 2 grande, 3 venti)  
Raspberry syrup (1.5 pumps, 2 grande and venti)  
Caramel whip on top, flan drizzle optional

is the day when we unveil our famous Pumpkin Spice Latte. It is a huge day for many customers as well as the barista. People have actually written songs about this day.<sup>7</sup> I know some customers who come back two or three times on that day just to get their Pumpkin Spice Latte.”<sup>8</sup>

“So personalization is about creating ritual for those you are connected to.”

“That is it,” Eric grinned. “The personalized relationship is lived out every day as an unwritten script performed every time a cup of coffee is bought at Starbucks. We take something ordinary and we infuse it with meaning and emotions. Listen, I better get back, but I will see you tomorrow, right?”

“Of course...” I said, knowing I was about to hear about the final pillar.

1. How can the church personalize the experience of worship for first time visitors?
2. How have you witnessed your minister personalize the message of the gospel?  
Have you seen personalization in any other aspects of worship?
3. How can the church make meaningful the seasons of the liturgical year for those in the community? Are there ways for your church to connect with the community through secular holidays?

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqlWRLufhCs>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.starbucks.com/menu/drinks/espresso/pumpkin-spice-latte>

## **Chapter 7: The Fourth Napkin – Own**

In some ways coming for my final lesson of the Four Pillars felt like when I was graduating from high school or college. I woke up knowing that Eric was going to share with me the fourth pillar, and from there I could begin working with the Elders of the church and our ministry teams to incorporate these pillars into the way we connect to the community. I was so excited about the possibilities that my wife Elizabeth was getting a little tired of me talking about Starbucks and The Four Pillars. As a matter of fact, she wondered out loud if there was a rehab for coffee addicts. Nevertheless, she was encouraged that I was confident that there was a path forward for our congregation as a means to connect to our neighboring community. Even my son Tripp knew where I was going this morning. Showing slight interest, he looked up from his bowl of cereal and said, “Enjoy your coffee, Dad.”

The funny thing about it was that it was Friday—my day off, and being my day off, it was the one day that I could sleep in. But I chose not to tell Eric this because I wanted to make sure that nothing would delay this conversation. Knowing that he always worked the morning shift I decided to forgo a few more hours of sleep. Being my day off; however, I was not wearing my usual coat and tie, but instead I put on a t-shirt and jeans and an old baseball cap. I didn’t even shave.

When I arrived I was so excited about the Fourth Pillar I forgot to order my coffee, but instead went straight away to our normal table. Knowing that Eric and I have a table made the pillars become more real. A few minutes later, Eric walked over with a grande size cup of coffee. “I think you forgot something.” He laughed.

“Oh, my gosh!” Truly embarrassed I got up and pulled out my wallet from my pant’s pocket.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Eric. “This one’s on me. Plus I think you are becoming one of my most loyal customers. You have no idea how these conversations have helped me clarify why I do what I do.”

Without hesitation he handed me my last napkin with the word “Own” written on it. I could not help but say the word out loud, “own.”

“I am not going to tell you that the fourth is the most important of the four pillars, but for me,” Eric claimed, “it helps me better understand the role I play in the lives of my customers. Over the past ten years having been trained as a barista and now training mostly young people to be baristas this last pillar reminds me that being a barista is more than just a job.”

I really liked Eric, appreciated his generosity, and wanted to know more about why he believed what he did. Curious, I asked, “If it is not a job, what is it?”

“Don’t get me wrong. Working here is a job. The reason I started working here is because Starbucks would work with my school schedule. A lot of people work here because we provide health insurance for even part time workers, and now Starbucks will help pay for your college education.<sup>9</sup> But, if you talk to those baristas who have worked here the longest, they will tell you that this last pillar is what keeps them here.”

“Okay, I am game. Tell me how ‘own’ provides your customers hospitality that they are looking for.” I was ready to add to my notes.

“I tell anyone who works for me that if working here is going to be fun for them and fun for the customer, then they have to own the experience. They have to not only

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<sup>9</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2014/06/20/pf/college/starbucks-college/>



own their own experience, but just as important they have to own the experience of the customer. As a matter of fact, I make it very clear that each barista has the power to change the course of history.

“It’s at this point in their training that most everyone thinks I have lost my mind. Kind of like you are thinking right now, but I believe what I am saying. Remember what I said the other day – ‘Starbucks is not in the coffee business. We are in the people business and we just happen to serve coffee.’”

Looking at Eric, it was obvious that he believed what he was saying. He continued by referencing our previous conversation about how he’s seen customers who have walked in here in the worst mood, only to leave feeling they are on top of the world.

“Why?” He now asked. “Because between the time they walked in and time they left, they interacted with me. I would never say that I have the power to change someone’s emotions, but I do believe I can make the customer’s day better by allowing him to know that I care.”

It was true. I saw every employee who owned his or her own experience empowering others with the responsibility to serve and not simply working for another paycheck. I could not help but once again think of that young family that walked into First Presbyterian Church. It frustrated me to no end that they were simply a nameless couple who just wandered into the church. Did anyone in the church show that couple and their daughter that they honored us with their presence? Did anyone really go out of his or her way to say, “Hey – we are glad that you are here!”? With no knowledge of their names, I had no way to find them to invite them back. How did we show them

hospitality? How did we serve them that day the way Jesus has served us? I had to ask, “How do you get your employees to own the experience?”

“Well, as you can imagine, it is not as easy as one would think,” Eric assured me. “Most everyone who is looking for a job at Starbucks has had coffee here before, and they heard we work with their schedule and/or offer great benefits. Those are all valid reasons to want to work for any company, but to own one’s experience we need that future barista to think differently. We need him or her to think about others before thinking about oneself; isn’t that at the heart of hospitality?”

“They have to believe they have been called,” I interjected. “I have been called to be a minister where I get to preach and teach and give pastoral care. Getting a paycheck at the end of the month is simply a bonus.”

“That is it,” Eric agreed. “I love what I do. It comes with its headaches, but I truly love it and I love the people I work with and most importantly I love the people I am called to serve. And when you feel this ‘call’, and love what you do, you can’t help but own your experience and take responsibility for the people you serve every day.”

Connecting the dots, I proclaimed, “So for the church to live out the Fourth Pillar – each member has to own the experience of the visitors who not only worship with us, but the truth is each member has to own the experiences of those they come in contact with outside the church. Okay. I think I am ready to take the Four Pillars to First Presbyterian Church.”

“Not so fast,” Eric quickly said.

1. How do you as a member of a church own your own experience in worship on Sundays? In the other six days a week as you live out your faith outside the church?
2. How do you as a member of a church own the experience of those who worship with you on Sunday? In the other six days a week as you live out your faith outside the church?
3. What have you been called to do in the church for the sake of hospitality?
4. What have you been called to do outside the church for the sake of hospitality?

*Moving Forward*

## Chapter 8 – But Who?

I have to admit I was a little stunned when the words, “Not so fast,” came out of Eric’s mouth. We just got through going over The Fourth Pillar and I was ready to hit the ground running. Now, Eric was telling me, “Not so fast.”

“I have been thinking,” Eric said, “I am not sure your congregation is ready to hear about The Four Pillars. Oh – they might listen to you, but will they understand or better yet, will they be willing to apply this in their own lives?”

Eric wiped at a sticky spot with a dishtowel. “And an even better question – will they be willing to live with the results? Let me tell you what I have been thinking about. What if you first shared the Four Pillars with a few of your church members who really are on fire for connecting to the community? If they are interested, I would be more than willing to sit down with them and talk about what needs to happen next, and what they should expect if your church is willing to live out hospitality through the Four Pillars. As I see it, there are four possible implications for the church if you decide to apply The Four Pillars in the life of your congregation.”

I guess the truth is I never even thought about those two points: how I was going to introduce the Four Pillars to First Presbyterian Church without the Elders or the members of the church who might likely think I had lost my mind. I am sure that would go over real well if the next Sunday I stood behind the pulpit and declared, “Hey everyone... all our problems are solved, thanks to the good people at Starbucks.” And something Eric said really caught my attention: what would the consequences be if our congregation implemented the Four Pillars in our lives and in the life of the church? There would be change. There would have to be change, but would it be a change the

congregation was willing to live with or even want, for that matter? When Eric mentioned bringing a group of people to talk about the Four Pillars and what it would look like to implement, I thought first of the Evangelism Team.

The Evangelism Team was made up of four members of the church. Each had a heart for connecting to our community and, just as importantly, all four had heard Jesus calling them to do something more. All four members had individually expressed their frustration of not really knowing what to do to make this happen. I was equally sure they were looking for the new minister—me—to provide direction.

There was Wendy and Steve who were the co-chairs of the Evangelism Team. Wendy was the only team member born and baptized in First Presbyterian Church. Not only was she and her family plugged into the church, so were her parents and younger sister and her family, not to mention a few cousins.

Steve, an engineer, had moved to Bakersfield after his company transferred him. He and his wife raised both of their girls in the church. One of their daughters moved to Florida, but the other recently got married and worshiped at the church with her new husband.

Terry joined First Presbyterian Church because his wife was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, and he would tell you, even though he was raised Baptist, after marrying Allyson, he knew he was predestined to be a Presbyterian.

Finally, there was Kathy who ended up at First Presbyterian Church with her family after parents of a child on her son's baseball team invited them to come and worship.

I shared the idea of enlisting the Evangelism Team, and Eric thought it would be as good a place to start as any. I mapped out for Eric my plan to approach the team at our next meeting and suggested that we should plan to meet in the next couple of weeks.

I asked the team if our next meeting could be at Starbucks, which surprised no one, since it was clear to everyone in the congregation that I was spending a lot of time there. Our first meeting was inked on the church calendar and I was filled with hope.

At the first meeting, I used my Gold Card to buy everyone coffee (even helping Steve place his order since it was his first time at Starbucks). Once the members of the team got their coffee, I shared with them the issues of decline and disconnect that not only face First Presbyterian Church; but many, if not all, churches in mainline denominations. I then briefly presented articles about how these challenges have found their way into large evangelical churches.

Steve said what I was sure everyone else was thinking, “Everyone in the church knows we need to do something. We just need someone to point us in the right direction.” Steve’s words were a perfect opening to introduce the Evangelism Team to Starbucks’ “Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service.”

One by one, I pulled out each napkin highlighting a pillar. Each member had his or her questions on how the Four Pillars could help our congregation in these changing times. As Eric had emphasized during our earliest dialog, I now made clear to the team that the Four Pillars were not some magical formula to grow our church. Instead, the Pillars merely mapped a path forward to allow the congregation to go deeper into connecting with our community through Christian hospitality.

“Hospitality,” Kathy wondered out loud, “isn’t that what the Fellowship Team does on Wednesday with Family Night Supper or the Care Team when they provide meals for our church members who have been sick?” Her question was helpful because it was my reminder that if this was going to work, then the church would need to buy into the understanding that even though Family Night Suppers and providing dinners for church members was hospitality, it was hospitality that looked inwardly. The Four Pillars gave the church the tools to look outward into the community... giving us opportunities to serve the community.

“I will do anything,” Wendy said, “if it means growing our congregation.”

This brought up another important point I needed to make: that the implication of the Four Pillars did not necessarily mean we would grow the church with new members. It was then that most of the members looked stunned.

“Then I am not sure what The Four Pillars have to do with us?” questioned Wendy.

I explained the best way I knew how. I shared with the team that I didn’t know of one church that would say that they didn’t want to grow. “Every church wants to grow,” I pointed out, “but few churches want to connect with the community. And when churches say they want to grow, what many are really saying is that they want to look the way they looked fifty years ago. They want to be a family church where everyone knows everyone by name. But if First Presbyterian Church is going to be around in the next fifty years, it will take the members of the church living a radical life of Christian hospitality, not for the sake of growing our church, but to grow the kingdom, to grow the kingdom in our community.”

So just as Eric and I planned out a couple weeks ago, I went over The Four Pillars, doing the best job I could using the notes I wrote down when Eric and I were together. The team had even more questions, and I answered the best way I knew how.

The true test for the Evangelism Team was actually meeting with Eric the next Saturday morning. Eric made it clear when we discussed the fourth and final pillar that in order to implement The Four Pillars, the church would have to commit itself to four steps. As we all gathered in what was becoming a familiar Starbucks, Eric was already there. He had reserved a large table for us.

Steve, who was becoming a pro at ordering, wanted to buy coffee for all of us. Once our coffees were made and brought to the table, I said, "Team, this is Eric Long. He is the manager at this Starbucks. I also want to point out that this is his day off just to note that he is passionate not only about the Four Pillars that I have introduced to you, but he is excited to work with us. Eric, this is the Evangelism Team."

For the next thirty minutes we spent time getting to know one another. Questions were asked, such as, "Where were you born?" and "Where did you go to school?" Then somewhere in the middle of the conversation Eric said, "Here is a question, and I even want Knox to answer it. It is in two parts: 1. tell me how you found First Presbyterian Church, and 2. next, tell me why you stayed all these years."

Over the next several minutes, we shared with Eric how it was that we found the church and why each of us stayed.

When the last person was finished, Eric said, "Did you hear it?" Looking back and forth at each other it was clear we were not sure what Eric was listening for. "Okay," said Eric, "Let me tell you what I heard. When each one answered how you found First



Presbyterian Church – your stories were different: some of you were born into the church, some of you were always Presbyterian, and some of you were invited to come. All are wonderful stories about how you became part of the church and all uniquely different from the others.”

Eric went on, “But, when I asked why you have stayed, it was then that your stories became *the same*. Each one of you is *still* a member of First Presbyterian Church because of the way the church lives out Christian hospitality.”

Eric clearly knew who his audience was, and thus, was not afraid to use the language of the faith so that the team could better understand his point. He continued, “I know Knox has been sharing with you Starbucks’ Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service and you are probably wondering why you should even care. That is a great question and believe it or not I have been wondering the same thing. As a matter of fact, I was wondering this as I drove over here this morning... wondering what in the world I was going to share with you about how The Four Pillars can encourage your congregation to reach out to its community.

“And then it dawned on me: The Four Pillars will empower you to take the very Christian hospitality that has bonded you to your congregation and turn it inside-out, so that now this very hospitality is facing out into the community. Your community.”

There were nods and a pause as each processed this shift in paradigm. Kathy spoke up, “Okay, but then what happens to our congregation? If I tell them that we are going to focus Christian hospitality on the community, the first thing they are going to ask is, ‘What about us? Who is going to take care of us?’”

I was about to speak up, but Eric had a ready answer. “Kathy, it is Kathy, right? That is a fair question and I am far from being an expert when it comes to the church, but I have a feeling that if you focused living out Christian hospitality in the community, then such hospitality would continue in the church.” Eric’s eyes lit up, “As a matter of fact, I bet you, that if First Presbyterian Church were to live out The Four Pillars, and thus turn Christian hospitality inside out, then the hospitality that you have for each other within the church would get even stronger.”

“Okay, let’s just say that is true,” said Steve. “As one of the chairs of the Evangelism Team, it will be part of my job to convince the Elders to buy into this; but ever since Knox shared with us about The Four Pillars, I keep asking what in the world it is. Listen – a couple of months ago, I never thought I would buy a \$3 cup of coffee, but I have to tell you I am pretty impressed with the number of people who do just that. Obviously, Starbucks is doing something right when it comes to connecting with people.”

Catching his breath Steve continued, “Knox tells us that you are not selling us some formulaic program, which is good because I cannot tell you how many programs the church has bought into and tried to implement over time, so how is this going to be different?”

Eric was not deterred, “Steve, I get it. You could easily think that The Four Pillars is simply corporate speak or some sales gimmick, but the truth is The Four Pillars gives Starbucks a path to simply tell its story to the community. For example, when we first met, I asked you two questions: One, how did you find the church, and two, why did you stay? And all of you had absolutely no problem sharing your story. Neither does Knox,” Eric looked over at me and raised his eyebrows, “In talking with Knox, I believe that The

Four Pillars will empower your people not only to tell their story of faith to the community around your church and in their neighborhoods, but, here he paused and waited for me to finish.

I jumped in, “Maybe even more importantly, they will be better equipped to live out their faith in the way they live for others.”

“I am following you,” confirmed Steve, “So the next question you know I am going to ask is, can The Four Pillars really change our church? Can something so simple make a big impact on our congregation and grow it? And not to upset anyone, but is this going to be a radical departure from life as we know it? I’m not sure I want a lot of people upset. The Four Pillars seems like it might upset the equilibrium. What about the old adage, ‘If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it?’ We could be better, but we could be worse off too.”

Steve asked the last in response to what I’d said from the very beginning, that The Four Pillars were not about adding people on the role or money to the offering plate. It was about renewing the church. Eric did not seem to mind Steve’s tone. In fact, what Eric said next seemed to affirm that he had been wrestling with the same questions.

“You know Steve,” Eric assured him, “I have been thinking the same thing. I have told Knox from the very beginning that living out The Four Pillars is not about adding numbers, but it is about connecting people to people and in your case helping the church connect with the community.”

Eric paused and went on, “Can The Four Pillars make a difference in the life of the church? This is the image I came up with: I see First Presbyterian Church as a ship, an old, large ship (I could tell Eric remembered that First Presbyterian Church has been in

our community for over 200 years) and that ship is going in this direction.” Eric pointed north. “But you tell me, Steve – you are the engineer – tell me what will happen if that ship changes its course of direction by just one degree.”

Steve was not sure where Eric was going, but he played along. “Within a matter of minutes, whether anyone would know it or not, the ship would be off course.”

“That is right,” said Eric, “but let’s assume that we make this simple change not to get off course, but to get back on course. You said it is such a simple change, and sure it will not seem obvious at the time and maybe not for awhile, but such a change will have a lasting impact.”<sup>10</sup> Eric continued, “But, Steve, going back to your original question – if First Presbyterian Church lives out The Four Pillars, will your church grow? My answer is I don’t know, but what I do know through my conversations with Knox is that churches all across the United States are in pretty bad shape as far as numbers go and being disconnected with their communities. I would never say that The Four Pillars is the solution to the problem, but it is a path forward, and in order to go forward, I think there are four steps your congregation has to implement. If you are willing, I would be more than glad to share them with you.”

Everyone looked at each other and nodded at once.

“Great!” said Eric, “If it works with you let’s meet next Saturday at the same time...” Kathy finished his sentence, “...same place.” Everyone laughed, “Yes,” said Eric. “If it is okay with you, let’s meet here at Starbucks.”

1. Answer Eric’s two questions he asked of the Evangelism Team:

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<sup>10</sup> <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20061229174143AAIM9GP>

- a. How did you find your present church?
  - b. Why have you continued to be a member?"
2. Why does it seem harder to produce positive change in the life of the church compared to negative change?
3. Who are the groups or people who could bring positive change into the life of the church?
4. What have been some positive changes your church has made in the past five years?

## Chapter 9: Step One – Invitation

The next Saturday morning as we all agreed, the Evangelism Team and I met with Eric at Starbucks. I was actually standing in line ordering my coffee when Kathy said behind me to the barista, “I got it,” as she pulled out her own Gold Card.

I looked at her surprised.

“What?” she said, “Do you think you are the only one who frequents this place?” We both laughed as we headed to our table where everyone else had gathered.

Eric started us off, “So I know Knox has gone over each of The Four Pillars and you have talked with him about the meaning of each pillar, but as we discussed last Saturday: one has to wonder what the implication are to First Presbyterian Church if your congregation lives out The Four Pillars in its daily life.

I chimed in, “Asked another way, how can we witness The Four Pillars manifested in the life of the church?”

“Exactly, Eric said. “Thanks. So let’s get started.”

Everyone looked at each other in agreement and Eric proceeded. “Let’s start off by me asking you another question – ‘Why are you here?’ Now before you answer, please know that this is not a trick question. Why are you here?”

Wendy was game, “You asked us to meet you here this morning.”

“That is right,” said Eric, “and when we invite someone to do something we call that a what?”

Wendy said, “Duh, an invitation.”

“Seems obvious, right? When we ask someone to do something or go somewhere or even join something, it is an invitation, but stay with me. As Starbucks implements

The Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service, we see the indicator that we are being successful in this endeavor when our customers *live an invitational life.*” To prove his point Eric said, “Now, it was too easy to ask why you are here this morning... because I invited you and of course you came last Saturday to Starbucks because Knox asked you to come. So, let’s do this. How about... if you are willing... all five of you find one person here this morning and ask two questions. The first question: how did he come to Starbucks the first time? And the second question: has she ever invited someone to Starbucks to have coffee? Go for it. Take about ten to fifteen minutes.”

It was clear that the Evangelism Team was a little apprehensive about this experiment, but they were committed to seeing where this was going. To lead by example, I also got up to participate. We all did our very best in our Presbyterian way not to disturb anyone too much, but everyone we initiated contact with more than welcomed the interruption.

The variety of those we talked with that morning was wide. I talked with the guy who comes in almost every Saturday morning. Steve spoke to a husband and wife. Wendy found a group of ladies that seemed to have come from yoga. Terry talked to a group of men whom I recognized as regulars. And finally, Kathy, who needed a refill, talked with the barista who was taking care of her order. Within about ten to fifteen minutes, we all finished up and headed back to our table where Eric was waiting for us. “So,” he asked, “what did you learn?”

Almost at once everyone, including me, tried to speak but upon seeing this was far from being decent and in order,<sup>11</sup> we went around the table to share what we heard and every single one of us shared the same thing. Everyone we talked to had been invited

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<sup>11</sup> “Decent and in order” is a phrase and a lifestyle Presbyterians love to live by.

by another to experience Starbucks for the first time except for the guy who was reading the newspaper. Even he had to admit that his wife had asked him on several occasions to join her before he accepted. It wasn't until, needing some caffeine on a business trip needing some caffeine that he decided to give it a try.

Eric reflected on our findings, "You see, I think when we live out The Four Pillars at Starbucks, our customers can't help but share with those around them what is going on in here. This is the reason that Starbucks invests very little money in advertisements like other traditional Fortune 500 companies. People have such a positive experience when they walk in that it is just natural to live invitationally. If this is true for Starbucks, why could it not be true for First Presbyterian Church? As a matter of fact, I would say all of you are part of First Presbyterian Church because someone invited you."

Wendy piped up, "That is where you are wrong Eric. I was born and baptized in this church. No one invited me. I just was."

"Okay," said Eric, "but if I remember from last Sunday, your parents moved to Murfreesboro before you were born, so how did they find the church?"

Wendy took out her cell phone and called her mother. After a few minutes of conversation Wendy told her mother she loved her and hung up the phone. Wendy reported back, "When my parents moved to Bakersfield there was an older couple next door who were members of First Presbyterian Church, and they invited them to attend worship with them. After that Sunday, my parents attended ever since."

But not quite wanting to give up her point, Wendy then asked, "What about Steve? Steve, you told us that you were a fifth generation Presbyterian and that when you



and your family moved to Bakersfield you opened up the phone book to find any and all Presbyterian churches, right?” Steve nodded in agreement.

Eric concurred, “I remember Steve sharing that too, but Steve’s connection to this particular denomination had to have a beginning. Someone, somewhere had to invite Steve’s great, great, great grandfather to come to church. I would argue that what we see in Steve is the power of invitation. Because someone invited some distant relative of Steve’s to come to church – First Presbyterian Church is simply reaping the benefit of that original invitation. And let us not forget, that Steve’s youngest daughter invited her boyfriend to church one Sunday and now they are married and both faithfully attending.”

Having been quiet for some time, I piped in once again thinking about that young couple and their daughter. “Eric, are you saying that everyone who enters our church to worship has been invited, because I too would have to argue. I know that is not true. I see people stumble across our church all the time with no invitation given.”

“I am sure that is the case,” said Eric, “but even then I have to believe an invitation was given... by someone. Oh, maybe they were not personally invited to come and worship at First Presbyterian Church, but somewhere before that Sunday morning someone invited them to experience God.”

Pushing further this idea of invitation, Eric continued, “Listen. Every one of you have shared with me that you are part of First Presbyterian Church because of invitation. Wendy: when your parents moved here before you were born someone invited them to church. Steve: someone invited your great, great, great grandfather to church. Terry, you are at First Presbyterian Church because your future wife invited you to worship with her.”

Terry made it clear, “She told me I was going to the Presbyterian Church or she was not going to marry me.”

“Fair enough,” replied Eric, “Terry, you may be the exception to the rule. Kathy, you said a couple from your son’s baseball team invited you and your family to worship with them. And Knox... you have the best invitation of all. This congregation invited you and your family to be part of their family. How cool is that for all of you?”

It was cool, and we all knew it as we were taking in everything that Eric was saying, but he was not quite finished. “If you are going to live out The Four Pillars and turn Christian hospitality inside out, then your people need to be about inviting other people to experience such generosity whether that is inviting those in the community to worship with you on a Sunday morning or,” Eric looked around, “inviting them to have a cup of coffee.

“Listen,” Eric said, “you have been coming to Starbucks for awhile, so how about next Saturday instead of meeting here, we meet at your church?”

I could not help but wonder where this was going. We’d just been invited to our own church.

1. Share how you were first invited to be part of your congregation. How has the church invited you to be part of the ministry of the church?
2. When was the last time you invited someone to experience your congregation? Was that a positive experience? What was the result?

3. Eric points out that Starbucks spends very little on advertising compared to other Fortune 500 Companies. What is your church's best advertisement to the community?

## Chapter 10: Step Two - Space

I wasn't really sure why Eric wanted to meet at the church and not Starbucks the following Saturday. I was a little nervous about it all. I have come to love First Presbyterian Church: not just for the people, but the structure itself. The church building is smack dab in the heart of downtown Bakersfield. It is actually three structures put together very awkwardly. There is the sanctuary built around 1914 in a Neo-Greek revival style. It was actually the second sanctuary built on that spot. The church voted to dismantle the first sanctuary when it became clear that the congregation was outgrowing it.

The "new" sanctuary has a theater-like feel with slanting floors with three sections of pews that lead to the chancel and the choir loft. The sanctuary has three beautiful stained glass windows on either side with both center windows having a sketch painting of Jesus: one where he is gathering his sheep and the other after the resurrection. The next building is our educational wing that was built soon after World War II to accommodate the baby boom. Once again the church tore one building down in order to build the newer building. Though showing its age, the educational wing is still in very good shape and well used Sunday School, the nursery, and our pre-school that runs Monday through Thursday during the school year.

Then finally there is *The Common Room* that is the newest structure built in the 1990's. It is made up of a large room that is a gym and fellowship hall, a commercial kitchen, newer classrooms, a parlor for the ladies, plus large bathrooms for both men and women that also have showers in case the gym has to be used as a shelter during an emergency. The good news is that the church paid off the debt for the new building about

five years before I arrived, so financially First Presbyterian Church had no mortgage, which after the housing crisis of 2008 kept our congregations' head above water while so many other churches struggled to make budget.

During the week leading up to his visit, Eric only had one request: that we set up the church building as if it was Sunday morning, which wasn't very hard.

That morning, everyone stood around in the barren Gym waiting for Eric to arrive. He, of course, brought the coffee.<sup>12</sup> Seeing there was nowhere to sit, we quickly moved into one of the classrooms. We drank our coffee and caught up on the week (it was clear that the Evangelism Team was becoming closer with Eric), but after a while Eric looked up and said, "Well, show me around. Is it alright if I bring my coffee with me?"

We all nodded yes, but I know what we were thinking: "But please don't spill your coffee in the sanctuary."

Eric said he first wanted to take a walk around the grounds, but there were not a lot of grounds since the church was land-locked on a city block. Walking around the church structure Eric noted that it did not seem that we had a lot of parking space.

I pointed out that on Sunday we had free use of city parking lots that are around the church.

Eric asked me, "But the church is "as is" as if this was Sunday? Meaning, if I came here tomorrow morning, this is what I would see when I pulled up with my family?"

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.starbucks.com/menu/drinks/brewed-coffee/coffee-traveler>

I should have known something was up, but I assured him everything was “as is,” as if it was Sunday.

After we walked around the outside, we came back and toured the inside. Again, Eric asked if everything was “as is,” and again we assured him that it was. He started asking questions like where would you go if you needed information about something, where was the nursery, where were the bathrooms, the choir room, the youth room, my office?

With each question we showed him where he wanted to go. The best part of the tour was when we took Eric inside the sanctuary. When we walked in he simply said, “Wow!” He found a pew and we sat for a few minutes as we all soaked in its beauty. He wrapped up our time in the sanctuary by saying, “You know I have driven by your church many times and I figured it was pretty on the inside, but I had no idea.”

After a while we ended back in the Sunday School class and poured ourselves another cup of coffee. It was then Eric said, “This church has terrible space.”

I almost spit out my coffee to defend our church, but before I could do so, everyone on the Evangelism Team showed a similar reaction. Earnestly, they all asked at once, “What do you mean?!” It was clear that the team was beginning to value Eric’s thoughts, but his statement was a shock.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Eric made clear, “you have great facilities. The sanctuary is absolutely beautiful and both the education wing and the Common Room seem well used and well taken care of, but the problem is... all of it is just... uninviting.” Eric continued, “Just to be fair, let me ask you again: everything is “as is,” as if this was Sunday morning and I was visiting your church for the very first time?”

I thought to myself, *Here it comes...*

“The space in and outside the church is not very inviting to visitors because if I was visiting for the first time, I would not know where anything was. You have no signs whatsoever pointing people in the right direction.”

I knew this was getting old, but again I thought of the young couple and their daughter. No wonder they did not know where to take their daughter. We had nothing and no one pointing them in the right direction. Eric continued, “When I pulled up to the church it was easy for me to find a parking space up front next to the church, but I have to figure such space by the church is prime real estate on Sunday. I did not see “visitor” parking signs reserving any of those spaces for guests. And even though you say that visitors and members can use the city parking; again, there is nothing that tells me that I can.”

Trying to catch our collective breath, Eric seemed on a roll, “And once inside, you have no signage whatsoever to point someone in the right direction.”

Steve nervously laughed, “I guess we assumed that if someone needed directions they would ask.”

Eric wasn't finished yet, “Where would they go to ask? You don't even have a visitor center where people can go with their questions. Where is the space that says ‘Come here... we've got the answers.’” And then as if he remembered one more thing, “Let's just say, as a visitor I blindly figure out where to go, and now all I want to do is sit and take it all in... where do I go just to sit? Just to sit and drink a cup of coffee? I see a lot of the space that you do have you are not even using. The gym is just an empty waste of space.” Seeing that he might be pushing the minister and the team a little too hard, Eric

ended with, “You have a great space. It is just poorly advertised. That is why space is the next step.”

Seeing that he had caught us off guard with his pronouncement, Eric said, “Let’s look at it this way. Kathy would you help me out? I know that like Knox you frequent Starbucks whenever and wherever you are. I want you to do me a favor.”

Always positive, Kathy replied, “I’m game.”

“Thank you,” said Eric. “What I want you to do is close your eyes and pretend that you are standing in the middle of my coffeehouse, and I want you to tell me where everything is located.”

Kathy, with her eyes closed, literally began to point, “Over in the right hand corner right when you walk in are the newspapers. Right next to the papers is the little hallway that leads to both the Men’s and the Women’s bathrooms. Then there is the area where there is cream and sugar to personalize your coffee: the Third Pillar.”

“Very good,” said Eric. “I can tell you are paying attention. Go on.”

Without hesitation, Kathy continued, “Just around the corner are what I guess I would call the knick-knacks – you know coffee cups and totes along with coffee beans – everything coffee. And, of course, you stand next to all the knick-knacks. Don’t forget the display case filled with goodies as you wait to order your coffee.” To again show that she was catching on, she added, “That’s a good use of *space*... And then, of course, there is place where the magic happens: the counter. It is where you and the baristas hang out to make our coffee. Once we get our coffee,” still pointing, “you have tables and chairs, two nice leather chairs and a couch and that long table where those older gentlemen have



sat the past several Saturdays drinking their coffee and reading the newspaper. And finally, outside is the patio.”

Eric looked very impressed, “Great job, Kathy. Now the bonus question: why did you know all of this?”

Kathy thought and came back, “because it was familiar.”

“What made it familiar?” Eric wanted more.

Kathy said, “We all know that if you go into one Starbucks, you have gone into them all, even though each Starbucks seems a little unique.”

“You got it Kathy. Thank you.” Eric really seemed impressed. “The way I see it the only way any company can offer hospitality in the community is when people are able to connect—when barriers have intentionally or unintentionally been removed from the space that is offered. I know you think I was going on and on about where to park and where the nursery was...and where I could I sit and drink a cup a coffee, but can you see how such issues create barriers to a visitor engaging and connecting to your church? No one wants to be worried that they might get lost or sit in the wrong place. And who really wants to ask a complete stranger where the bathrooms are located?”

Terry chimed, “I get it. When my family first visited the church we did not even know what door to come in, but over time we just kind of figured it out on our own.”

Steve stepped in the conversation. “I always thought it was silly the tables and chairs that are set up in the room for Wednesday night supper are taken down on Sunday. We have nowhere to go, nowhere to have a conversation, and yes, we have nowhere to drink our coffee.”

Eric sensing we had been there for awhile said, “Let me leave this question with you: How have you placed obstacles in your own life preventing people around you from connecting to you as a Christian? If you are going to apply The Four Pillars, you are going to have to get rid of those obstacles in your church and in your life. I will see everyone next Saturday.”

So much to think about.

1. Close your eyes and describe your church on any given Sunday? Do you have signs that produce an inviting space? Would a visitor easily find everything in your church?
2. What does your space say about the congregation? Have you placed any barriers in the space of the church that might produce anxiety for a visitor?
3. Does your congregation have a Welcome Center? Why or why not? What happens in that space?
4. Eric asked, “How have you placed obstacles in your own life preventing people around you from connecting to you as a believer?” Answer his question.

## Chapter 11: Step Three - Connection

Eric asked me during the week while serving my morning coffee if I would mind being a few minutes late for our next Saturday gathering. He assured me that he would be on time to meet the Evangelism Team and that he would come up with a great excuse for my being late. He had an experiment he wanted to try, but it was important that I was not there.

“Fifteen minutes good for you?” I asked.

“That would be perfect,” Eric replied.

So that Saturday, I arrived fifteen minutes late as planned. Driving over I was very curious what Eric had in mind. When I walked into the coffeehouse, I saw that everyone had gathered around some tables. They seemed to be having a great time. As a matter of fact, I did not seem to be needed at all. They all waved as I walked in, but went right back to their discussion. I grabbed my coffee, doctored it up with some half & half and joined everyone.

Eric greeted me, “Morning, Knox. Thanks for being late.”

Everyone looked at Eric puzzled.

“I asked Knox to be late this morning because of an experiment. I wanted to see what would happen if I met with you alone. I wanted to see if there was an established connection between us, because connection is the third step that takes place when implementing The Four Pillars in your lives.”

Terry piped in, “Wait a minute – I thought *connection* was The Second Pillar.”

I was thinking the same thing.

“No, go back in your notes,” said Eric.

So we all went back to the notes we had been keeping. Eric was right. Everyone could see that The Second Pillar was not connection, but connect.

Terry continued, “Okay, I was wrong, but what is the difference?”

“For the customer who visits Starbucks... maybe nothing, but to Starbucks there is a huge difference. If you look at your notes, you’ll see that I shared The Second Pillar of Connect is the relationship developed between barista and the customer...”

“And the customer and the barista,” Terry read from his notes.

“That is right. It is the relationship that is being developed between the two. As I said to Knox, The Second Pillar is important to convince a customer that they need to come back. But the third step of connection is slightly different; and it’s a difference that is important to understand. Remember these four steps are really signs to the church that The Four Pillars are actually linking the church to the community. The third step is connection. We are not talking about some abstract notion of community or church. The question now being asked: are the very real people in the community connecting with the very real people in the church?”

Steve, writing all of this down, spoke up, “Well, first time visitors always receive two letters: one from the Evangelism Team and one from Knox. If you are a second time visitor, someone from the Evangelism Team will call to say hello and to see if you have any questions about the church that we can answer.”

“That is great,” said Eric, “And I would tell you that you are already doing something important in implementing The Second Pillar, but I need to ask you this—out of all those visitors you have called over the years, how many did you recognize the following Sunday if they returned?”

Being honest, Steve answered, “The truth is not many, if any at all.”

“Why not?” Eric asked.

“Because I did not know what they looked like,” said Steve.

“That is okay. I get it. You had a name, but no face to go with it. Well, when there is a connection with those people outside your community, they get a sure sense that those inside the church really care in a deep and meaningful way. Steve – what do you think would happen if, when you called these visitors you said, ‘Hey, next time you are in church how about we sit together?’ and you figured out a place and time to meet? What would happen?”

Steve came back quickly, “There would definitely be a connection: a face to the name.”

“And here is something else,” Eric continued, “I guarantee you won’t forget their name either. Because I suspect out of all those people you have called on behalf of the Evangelism Team, it was only a matter of a few days, and you forgot their names because there was not connection.

“Let’s say you actually did meet up with that visitor the following Sunday. You called him by name and you sat with him in church and you introduced him to your friends in the church. Let’s just say you did all of that. Even if the person never joins your church, even if he never comes back again, I promise you every time he drives by he will think to himself, *I know someone who goes there.*

Steve said, “With that newfound connection, the chances of that visitor worshiping with us on a regular basis and eventually joining our church are greater because there is a connection.”

“Preach it!” Eric gave a hearty laugh. “That is exactly what I am saying. But this connection cannot just be placed on Knox’s shoulders, as if it was his responsibility alone. Nor is this just some project for the Evangelism Team. No, if The Four Pillars are lived out, then connection has to be a commitment of the entire congregation: one that happens not only in the church, but outside the church as well. Are your church members connecting even with those who are not visiting your church? Remember the Four Pillars is about living out hospitality both inside *and outside* the church walls.”

Wendy chimed in, “Can you give me an example of connection within your Starbucks?”

“Sure,” said Eric, “Starbucks provides space in the coffeehouse for connections to be happening everywhere. That is why I asked Knox to be late... to show that a connection has grown between the two of us. You see the men over there at the large table?”

We all nodded because those men were always at that table when we met on Saturdays. As a matter of fact, those same men seemed to be at that table every time I came in for coffee and pastry before heading into the office.

“All of them were strangers before the connection happened at Starbucks. It started when that gentleman in the baseball cap was drinking his coffee and reading his paper and the man beside him asked if he could borrow his sports page. From that day forward, slowly and naturally, they built a connection that has grown as they include other men to come join them.”

Wendy asked, “Do you think they knew that is what they were doing—building a connection thanks to Starbucks’ Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service?”

“Not at first, and I am pretty sure I have never talked with them about The Four Pillars,” Eric replied, “But, you see that man in the red shirt to the left? Four months ago he lost his wife to cancer. He was new to the table, but in their conversations they all knew what was going on. Much to his surprise, his table of men came to his wife’s funeral, and so did I. Why? For those men – he is more than just a guy who would join them for coffee. He is Bill and he is their friend.”

Obviously moved by this example, Eric paused and then finished his thought. “And even if Bill never comes back to Starbucks, he will always be grateful for the connections he made here. That is what you want for First Presbyterian Church, isn’t it? I think that is ultimately what we all want.”

I asked, “Eric, is this what you meant when you said when the church lives out The Four Pillars, her members cannot help build connections in and outside the church?”

Before Eric could answer, Kathy answered for him, “I think so. Because connection is the true measure of living out The Great Commission. Making disciples is about being in relationships with those around you just as we are in relationship with Jesus. When I was first asked to be on The Evangelism Team I thought the Elders wanted me to knock on doors which scares me to death, but if evangelism is about being in relationship with real people in my community... if it is about being connected with those around me... I can do that. I can do that because of what Jesus continues to do for me.”

Wendy provided more, “This really brings it back full circle. Through hospitality, we see Jesus in those around us and those around us see Jesus in us.”

“Great,” said Eric. “So next Saturday we will talk about the fourth and final step.”

1. What is the difference between the church being connected to the community and the people in the church seeking connections with people in the community?
2. How does your congregation follow through with first time visitors?
3. How does your congregation better facilitate the possibility of connections with people outside your congregation?
4. How do you live out the Great Commission in your life?



## Chapter 12: Step Four – Ownership

Meeting on Saturday morning was becoming a ritual for us. Steve reminded us that it takes about a month to develop a tradition. Over the past month, I truly enjoyed my Saturday mornings with the Evangelism Team. It was a great way to get to know these Elders in a more meaningful way, and probably just as important since moving to Bakersfield and becoming the Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. I felt the full responsibility of finding a path forward in renewing the church. In gathering together on Saturday, I realized that I was not alone and through The Four Pillars I felt like I had found it.

When Eric arrived, unlike when we first met with the Evangelism Team where everyone wondered why they were there and where all of this would go, this Saturday we just spent time talking and catching up, and somewhere in the middle of the conversation Steve voiced what we were all thinking. “I really love drinking coffee with you guys here at our Starbucks.” Everyone started laughing with Steve looking confused. “I don’t get it. Why are you laughing?”

Kathy could not help it, “You know why we are laughing. Before we started meeting on Saturday you had never walked into a Starbucks let alone this Starbucks and now...show us what is in your wallet.”

Steve blushed and pulled out his very own Gold Card.

“And here is what is great,” continued Kathy. “This is no ordinary Starbucks. You said this was *our* Starbucks.”

Looking around Steve asked, “Well it is, isn’t it?”

“It certainly is,” said Eric. “In this conversation, and to understand the final implication of living out The Four Pillars, we need to talk about ownership.” Looking at Steve who was about to speak up, Eric said, “I know. I know what you are going to say, Steve. The Fourth Pillar of ‘own’ and the fourth step of ‘ownership’ are awfully close and I would agree, but let me point out the degree of difference. The Fourth Pillar is about the barista owning the experience.”

Terry reading his notes out loud, said, “If working at Starbucks is going to be fun for the barista, and fun for the customer, then the barista has to own the experience. They have to not only *own* their experience, but just as important they have to *own* the experience of the customer.”

“Spoken in exact detail like a true CPA,” laughed Eric, “Those are my words about The Fourth Pillar with every “I” dotted and every “T” crossed. I must tell you, however, that in many ways this final step is the most important step in understanding whether your church is implementing The Four Pillars, not only in the life of the congregation, but in the lives of the individual members.

“As I understand it, the final pillar is about our responsibility as a member of First Presbyterian Church,” I said.

“Yes, all the while looking outward. The final step looks at people in the community. You see, what the final step asks is if those people in your community take ownership, not only in First Presbyterian Church, in your mission, and your ministry, but maybe more importantly do they take ownership in living out a faith that follows Jesus into the world?”

Steve piped in, “This the moment when those we have been connecting with join our church?” He paused, “But, of course, membership is not why we are doing all that we are doing.”

Eric smiled, seeing Steve’s effort, “Steve – before I answer your question, let me ask you a question. You said to the group that this was ‘our Starbucks.’ I think it is great you feel this way. So here is the question: there are five Starbucks in Bakersfield. The reason you came to this Starbucks is because Knox first invited you. But, is there a Starbucks closer to your house?”

Steve answered, “There is...”

Eric continued his line of questioning, “In the past month, have you gone to that Starbucks?”

“I have. Not often, but you already knew that,” Steve replied.

Everyone, including myself stared back at Eric knowing he knew something we did not know. Eric needed to explain, “Steve, tell everyone why I knew that.”

Steve looked at everyone around the table and answered, “Because I have been coming here before my morning commute almost every morning around 6:00 a.m. as I head into work in Nashville.”

“And who do you see almost every morning at 6:00 a.m.?” asked Eric.

“You...” said Steve. “It was Eric who convinced me I really needed to get the Gold Card. Truth be told, the coffee I am drinking this morning was because of a reward that I received. I also discovered that every once in a while I treat myself with one of

those frou-frou drinks with whipped cream, but don't tell my wife. Do you know how many calories are in one of those things?"<sup>13</sup>

Kathy and Wendy nodded in agreement. It was clear they paid attention to the calorie count that is next to each drink on the menu board behind the barista.

"But I feel like this is *our* Starbucks," Steve continued. "This is *my* Starbucks. I guess that is why I pass by the Starbucks closest to my house just to come here in the morning."

"So, to answer your question, Steve," said Eric, "Maybe the final step of ownership is when someone who has been visiting your church wants to join and maybe it is not, but what I think is more important is that very moment when a person believes First Presbyterian Church is *their* church. It is the moment when asked, 'So, where do you go to church?' they answer, 'First Presbyterian Church.' It is the moment when they drive downtown and go by the church and they think to themselves, *that is where I worship on Sundays or have dinner on Wednesday nights or a play on the church softball team*. It is the moment they think and believe that this church downtown and these people in the pews are *my* church and *my* people. And isn't that at the heart of hospitality?"

I spoke my thoughts out loud, "Blessing someone in a way they feel truly wanted... where they feel they belong. Connecting with them the way Jesus has connected with us through out our lives."

Right then all of us put down our pencils and we all looked at each other taking in Eric's words. What became clear is that every one of us had a moment in our lives when we took ownership of First Presbyterian Church—not the building, even though the

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.starbucks.com/menu/drinks/frappuccino-blended-beverages/caramel-ribbon-crunch-frappuccino-blended-beverage>

sanctuary is beautiful—but, when we took ownership of the people. We took ownership in living out our faith the best way we knew how and that was why the people of First Presbyterian Church live for the people in our community.

I thought to myself, *This is it. This is what this journey has been about. All of it: The Four Pillars... the four steps and not just a journey I have been on, but a journey Steve, Wendy, Terry and Kathy have been on too. As a matter of fact, it has even been a journey that Eric has been on.* It was true that so many churches were struggling with declining membership and an ever present disconnect with their communities, but maybe part of the problem is that we were going about it all wrong. Maybe instead of trying to add people to the church roll, the church simply needs to reclaim the community by connecting to the community, or as Eric would put it, “turn Christian hospitality inside out.”

Now, for the hard part... what to do? Maybe I said it out loud or maybe everyone was thinking the same thing because Steve proclaimed what I think everyone was wrestling with, “Now we have to share this with the rest of the church.” Every one of us (including Eric) agreed to meet every Saturday until we had a plan in place to present to the governing body of Elders and eventually share with the whole church.

1. When did you know your church was *your* church? When did you know you had ownership?
2. When did you know you had ownership in your community? How have you seen this in your own life?
3. What is the difference between ownership and membership of a church?

## **Chapter 13: One Degree – Moving Toward Change**

(Six Months Later)

I wish I could tell you that it did not take us long to figure out a plan to implement Starbucks' Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service into the life of First Presbyterian Church. I wish I could tell you that it wasn't a challenge for the Evangelism Team to come up with a way to ascertain whether or not we were living out those pillars through the four steps Eric shared with us... but, that was just not the case. It is one thing to have a plan in mind; it is another to put that plan into place. Every Saturday we gathered at Starbucks. We had to say over and over again that what we were going to share with the Elders of the church was not a method or a formula to grow the church, but instead was a way for the church through hospitality to reconnect with our community.

In some ways we knew this would be a major shift for our congregation, but it would especially be a change for ministry teams because we wanted our teams to be guided by The Four Pillars: anticipate, connect, personalize and own. I could just hear the Stewardship Team asking, "What do the Four Pillars have to do with collecting and counting the offering?" But Steve and the others did not necessarily see this as such an obstacle. As Steve pointed out several times, "In so many ways the church and our ministry teams are living out The Four Pillars. We just need to get them to see how; and to see that what they are already doing and how this can be shifted outward for the sake of the community, whom we are called to serve." Steve would often repeat, "We only need to get this old ship turning one degree."

Meeting every Saturday, it became clear to me that the Evangelism Team was going to take the ball and run with it. Towards the end of the year, at the monthly meeting

with the Elders of the church, Steve informed everyone that his team was working on a new path forward, not only for our ministry teams, but for the whole congregation in order to have a greater presence in the community.

Knowing that in January of every year, the Elders have a weekend retreat, Wendy asked the Elders if the Evangelism Team might use that time to introduce everyone to this new path. She also mentioned that her team had cleared their plans with the new minister and that I was on board. No one at that meeting objected. As a matter of fact, some of the Elders actually seemed relieved, because in years past the retreat merely consisted of each ministry team reading reports of what they did the previous year and what they wanted to do in the new year, not to mention that the Fellowship Team always tried to get everyone to participate in some team building exercise.

Getting through Christmas and starting the New Year, all the Elders gathered for the annual retreat on Friday evening. Steve had all the Elders gather in their ministry teams. The Evangelism Team was up front and center. Steve stood before everyone and shared his story of how he and his family arrived at First Presbyterian Church. He mentioned the saints of the church who have since gone who were so hospitable to his family. “I am a blessed man. We are all blessed to call this church home,” Steve said, “which got me thinking – I wonder how many people in our community long for what we have. I have to believe a lot. Yet, why can’t we get them interested in First Presbyterian Church?”

Terry tag teamed Steve, “We know many of you are worried about the future of our church and even though right now everything seems to be going great especially with the arrival of Knox and his family, let’s face it – ever since Knox arrived we have been

looking to him for answers when it comes to our future. But what if the answer to our challenge of growing the church is not how do we add more people to the church roll? What if the answer is found in how we reconnect with our community, the very community that longs for what we have, but we seem to have a hard time reaching? And what if that way forward, to borrow a phrase from an old friend ‘is to turn Christian hospitality inside out?’”

And much to my surprise, Steve said, “To show us how to do this I want to introduce you to an old friend of mine. This is Eric, and he is the manager of my Starbucks.”

That Friday night Eric and the Evangelism Team shared with the Elders and their ministry teams their understanding of Christian hospitality and introduced them to Starbucks’ Four Pillars of World Class Customer Serve. Kathy reinforced Steve’s earlier point that through The Four Pillars we wanted to turn Christian hospitality inside out. By doing so the Evangelism Team believed that not only could First Presbyterian Church reconnect with our community, the team believed this path forward would bring renewal to the church. “Listen,” she said, “When I was first approached with this idea, I was as skeptical as you probably are right now, but I have never been more excited about the future of our church.”

The next Saturday, we did not lose one Elder for the second day of the retreat, which I was told never happens. After breakfast the Evangelism Team had the Elders break up into their ministry teams. We had one icebreaker where we asked each Elder to share the following: tell us how you found First Presbyterian Church and next tell us why you stayed all these years? Going from table to table one could see they really enjoyed



sharing their stories and just as much they enjoyed hearing everyone else's story. When the icebreaker was over the Evangelism Team discussed with the Elders how each ministry team could possibly live out The Four Pillars in their ministries.

Just before lunch all the Elders were brought together to share what they talked about in their ministry teams and for the first time I actually heard the Elders speak about their ministries in a way that would not only have an impact in the life of the church, but in the life of the community. One Elder spoke up and said, "I am kind of getting how my ministry team could use The Four Pillars, but what does this mean for the church as a whole? What does this mean for individual members?"

"Great question," said Steve. "During lunch, let's break up again in small groups and talk about ways we can use the Four Pillars as a congregation."

There was a lot of brainstorming going on at lunch, so much so that each table appointed a recorder to write each idea down. After lunch was over, each table shared their ideas about the possibilities and challenges of implementing the Four Pillars into the life of the church. The Elders seemed really excited until one Elder raised his hand and asked, "All of this seems great and I know we are excited now, but I have been to these retreats before where great ideas were shared, but nothing was done about it. How is this retreat going to be any different?"

Wendy knew this was coming, "That is a great point. The Evangelism Team knows that if there is no follow through, then all of this has been a waste of time and this is why we want to two things. First, we have come up with what we call the Four Steps of Implication, thanks to our friend, Eric. Each Step will help your ministry team know if you are living out The Four Pillars. Are we inviting those inside and outside the church

into our lives? Do we provide space where relationships can happen and is that space clearly defined? Are new connections happening between the church and the community? And finally, do the people of our community take ownership with the people of First Presbyterian Church? You see, we think these questions need to be asked every time a ministry team meets, every time the Elders of the church gather. Any time we do anything whether it is a new idea or old. If we are going to turn Christian hospitality inside out, then we have to know whether or not what we are doing is effective.”

Steve pointed out, “The answers to these questions will tell us if we are accomplishing our goals. Because if the church is not inviting people, if we are not providing a safe space together, if we are not building connection, if those outside the church feel no ownership inside the church, then we have probably missed the mark.”

Tying everything together, Terry concluded, “This can’t happen in our church simply because the Elders say it is going to happen. Therefore, the Evangelism Team with your support, wants to host a church-wide retreat where the Elders of the church introduce the membership to the very things we have been talking these past two days.”

The church-wide retreat was held two months later. Every Elder was there and over two thirds of the congregation was present. Even Eric Long was there. And yes, we served Starbucks coffee.

1. Having read how The Evangelism Team approached the Elders, how would you introduce your leaders to The Four Pillars?
2. What do you think of The Evangelism Team’s check list: Are we inviting those inside and outside the church into our lives? Do we provide space where

relationships can happen and is that space clearly defined? Are new connections happening between the church and the community? And finally, do the people of our community take ownership with the people of First Presbyterian Church?

- a. Is there anything you would add to the list?
- b. Is there anything you would take away?

## **Chapter 14: The Conclusion and A Simple Cup of Coffee**

(Two Years Later)

It has been about two years since the Elders of the church decided to adopt The Four Pillars as a renewal plan for First Presbyterian Church. The church-wide retreat went well. At the time, most of the congregation was still, at best, curious about what Starbucks had to do with Christian hospitality while reaching out to our community. From the beginning, as the Evangelism Team and I continued to meet at Starbucks, we knew for this to work, two things had to take place.

First, the Elders and their ministry teams had to buy into The Four Pillars, which was at first difficult for many of them, especially when they had to move away from thinking that The Four Pillars was not a formulaic evangelism program with easy to follow steps. Instead, at every meeting we continued to go over The Four Pillars to remind the Elders that through anticipating, connecting, personalizing, and owning, First Presbyterian Church and her members would be empowered to turn hospitality inside out.

The second challenge was convincing the congregation they could make a difference in their neighbors' lives. In fact, starting in the fall of that first year, one exercise that we did with the Elders, and as a congregation, was to share how The Four Pillars had made a difference in our lives and the lives of those around us. It was breathtaking to see these very reserved Presbyterians openly share how they saw God moving in them to connect with their community while engaging visitors when they walk through the church door and continuing to engage them in an ongoing welcoming way. We even heard those stories where the church or an individual failed in this endeavor for one reason or another, but continued to push forward in the desire to be connected to the

community. The most powerful stories came when individual members shared how they had been applying The Four Pillars at home in their neighborhoods or while taking a walk in the park. As an 88-year-old saint said in one of our sessions, “We all have a story to tell. The story is how Jesus changed our lives and what joy it is to share it with everyone I meet.” Two years later, the Elders continue this exercise, and every ministry team does the same before every monthly meeting.

Did it work? Did Starbucks’ Four Pillars of World Class Customer Service give the church new insight into Christian hospitality as a way to reach out to our ever-changing community? I hate to end this book by saying only time will tell, but only time will tell. What most of the Elders and members of the church would tell you is that with The Four Pillars we have a path forward and with Eric’s Four Steps of Implication we have a litmus test for whether the church and our ministry teams are on the right path or not.

Reminding the Elders that we only have to change the direction of the ship one degree, we can change the course of our history, seems to be key, and the church has made changes in how we approach Sunday mornings. For example, the Property Team continues to make remarkable changes. They built a centrally located welcome center that has a volunteer standing by every Sunday to answer questions. Now during announcements, it is so easy to say, “Questions can be answered at the Welcome Center.” Also more signage was added both inside the church pointing the way to bathrooms and the nursery, and outside showing visitors where to park and what doors to come in. And more than just signs, now we have members standing in each parking lot and at each door greeting people as they come to worship. Even the ushers are proactive. Not only do they

hand out bulletins, they point people in the right direction and they always have smiles on their faces.

The best thing that happens on Sunday (other than my sermon) takes place in our gym. In a group effort of our ministry teams with Steve's leadership, we actually built our own version of a coffee house. We do not make lattes and we do not serve Starbucks coffee, but instead, we prepare free trade coffee produced by Young Life in Nicaragua,<sup>14</sup> a mission our church has been in partnership with before I arrived. The feel of the space is now open to connections. Circular tables and chairs now fill the once barren gym. On another note, since we introduced the church to The Four Pillars, we have seen growth in both membership and baptism, but interestingly enough fewer and fewer people seem concerned about our future. And just last week Eric Long and his family started worshipping at our church.

1. How could The Four Pillars and The Four Steps of Application help your church find a path forward in reaching out to your community?
2. How can the four pillars and the four steps of application make a difference in your own life as you live out your faith?

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<sup>14</sup> <http://beyondbeanscoffee.com/young-life>

**Epilogue 1:**

Walking into the 11:00 a.m. worship service I felt a little rushed, which was normal. My day was already running long: arriving at the church at 6:00 a.m., going over my sermon a few more times, the early service at 8:30 a.m., Sunday School, spending time with people at the new coffee house, I was heading into the second service with very little time to catch my breath. As I stood before the congregation, I welcomed everyone especially our visitors. I no longer make announcements in tribal language that only our members can understand. The announcements are for both member and visitor, so I always clarify that for more information they can speak to our volunteers at the Welcome Center. Finally, I invited everyone to greet one another in the name of Jesus Christ. The congregation now moves around about with the members looking for new faces to say hello. Even with the organist beginning the prelude, it takes time for everyone to find his or her seats, which is a small price to pay for such a Spirit filled moment.

I found my seat in the chancel and tried to quiet my mind for worship. It was while one of my associates was leading the call to worship that I saw them—a young couple who could be no older than thirty. In his arms was a little girl dressed in pink who is no more than twelve months old. I could tell when they walked in that they were a bit haggard and not really sure what to do next. One of the ushers spotted them as they came in. I could see he was talking to them and I watched him point in the direction of the nursery. Next time I looked, all four of them had disappeared only for the adults to arrive back a few minutes later without the little girl. Coming back into the sanctuary, the usher walked the young couple to where the usher's wife was sitting. She slid over and softly greeted them. I let out a breath of relief.

I lost sight of them for the rest of the worship service as I delivered my sermon. I gave the benediction and with the postlude playing, I went outside to greet the worshipers. I was out shaking hands for no more than ten minutes when the usher and his wife came outside with the young couple with daughter in tow. The usher said to me, “Rev. Knox – I want you to meet our new friends. This is Wendy and William Fields and their daughter Claire.”

### **Epilogue 2:**

It had only been a few months after my retirement that my wife looked at me early one morning and said, “You need a hobby.” For most of my life I worked for a large shipping company that transferred me almost every five years. With the last transfer I requested a position in our Nashville office to be close to our children and grandchildren. My wife and I chose to move to Bakersfield because it was a little less hectic than Nashville, but had everything we would ever want or need as far as stores and restaurants and entertainment goes. However, with work keeping me busy, I never really had time to invest in my new hometown. After my retirement, I just kind of hanged out around the house and that is when my wife said to me, “You need a hobby.” She did not need to tell me twice. I smiled and told her I needed to run a few errands.

I got in my car and was pulling out of my driveway when I ran over the newspaper. I backed out, got out of the car and picked it up, throwing it in the back seat. I love reading a newspaper and in every new town we moved to, we subscribed to the local paper, but in the busyness of it all I rarely had time to read it. Now in retirement, I read it from cover to cover.



As I was driving along through Bakersfield, I was not sure where I was going to go or what I was going to do, when I passed by a familiar green sign: Starbucks. I had never pulled into a Starbucks by myself. My wife would often ask me to pull in and she would order me something from the drive thru. There were also those occasional times in the airport when I would grab a small cup of coffee: black, no sugar. I had never really seen the need to walk into a Starbucks by myself, but since it was clear my wife needed me out of the house for a few hours... I thought I might as well.

The minute I walked in I was hit with the overwhelming aroma of fresh coffee, which opened up my sinuses and gave me a morning jolt. The coffeehouse was crowded with commuters rushing in because they did not want to wait in line at the drive thru. A number of people gathered around tables by themselves or with others, but it was clear that the place was alive with a caffeine rush. I stood in line feeling a little nervous because I was not sure what I was going to order. Before I knew it, I was in the front of the line. That is when I heard, "Good morning. Welcome to Starbucks." Standing behind the cash register was a man wearing a green apron. His name was Eric. I knew his name was Eric because of his nametag on the apron. "What can I get you this morning?" Eric asked.

I just came out and confessed, "I'm not really sure. I never come in here by myself. My wife always orders me a cup of coffee."

"Well," said Eric, "Let's not do anything too radical this morning. Do you drink your coffee with cream and sugar, or just black?"

"Black," I answered.

“Then how about I get you our dark roast and make it a grande which is a medium size cup?”

“Sure,” I answered not really certain what I should say, but now trusting Eric to help me along.

I watched Eric pour my coffee into a cup. He brought it over to me and said, “Take a sip and tell me what you think.” I took a sip. It was a little bit harsh compared with what I was used to, but I thought I would give it try. I nodded to show my enjoyment.

Looking at Eric, I smiled, “Thank you Eric. You have been helpful.”

“You are welcome but I did not get your name,” Eric replied.

“Bill. My name is Bill.”

Eric smiled back, “Bill, I hope you have a great morning.”

I took my coffee and newspaper and looked around for a place to sit. Much to my surprise there were two leather chairs by a fireplace. The chairs reminded me of similar chairs I have back at the house. There was a guy sitting in one as he was working on his computer. I sat down next to him with a little table in between us.

I opened my newspaper starting with the sport page. I was so into what was happening with the Atlanta Braves that I did not notice that the man with the computer had left and an older man about my age was sitting down with a book. Finishing the sports page, I placed it neatly on my lap. A few minutes later I heard a request, “Excuse,” came from the man next to me, “Do you mind if I borrow your sports page. I left my paper back home.”

I took the paper and handed it to him, “Here you go, and if you want, I am about to finish up the Local Section too.”

“Oh, that would be great,” he replied.

We both sat there in silence for a while until I finished drinking my coffee and figured it would be a good time to head back home. That’s when I leaned over and said, “Here is the rest of the paper. I hope you have a good day. Oh, by the way, my name is Bill.”

“Bill, my name is David. I come here almost every morning to get my coffee fix. Maybe I will see you tomorrow?” he asked.

“You just might David. You just might.”

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