Church Guests Matter: A Strategic Program to Welcome Guests

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By

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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This project will measure the success of acquiring and retaining guests by gauging the efforts made to welcome guests by utilizing a questionnaire among community guests. A Church sitting in a diverse community in Moravian Falls, North Carolina, accessible to nearby schools and a local town is in decline. Today, small churches close their doors, and pastors are leaving the vocational ministry. The ministry of the church is to fulfill the greatest commandment by loving God and loving others. However, many churches today have confined the essentials of the church to inside the walls. A church willing to seek the community through loving others and welcoming those to worship can restore the church’s greatest calling. Effective strategies used to be successful in reaching the community and being welcoming to guests.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31 (CSB).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A welcoming church provides an opening and safe environment for guests to attend. Utilizing a functional, welcoming church offers a more optimal experience for guests before they ever enter the doors. This researcher will assess the current motive for welcoming guests at Cub Creek Church by examining the current model. In a review of the current model, this project will attempt to determine a welcoming church’s characteristics and evaluate Cub Creek Church’s very model.

There is a need for change in guests’ service at Cub Creek. Perhaps the direction of connecting leadership to guests will provide satisfactory results that discover models to help Cub Creek. The health of a church is dependent on leadership. A healthy leadership reflects the image of Christ as seen in the book of Ephesians, just as the church resembles the image of Christ.

Ministry Context

This section of the thesis project will provide insight into the current ministry model of Cub Creek. Cub Creek is a small church in rural Moravian Falls, North Carolina, and affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and Brushy Mountain Baptist Association. The ministry model of Cub Creek exists of leadership, ministries, congregation, and community functions.

In the community of Moravian Falls, North Carolina, sits a small church named Cub Creek. Cub Creek is a traditional Baptist Church with a long, rich history. The church has several long-time members who have aged their time in the community. A church in dire need of revitalization as a steady decline has impacted the church significantly in the past few years.
With the community's cultural dynamics and "that is how we have always done it" approach, Cub Creek remains in decline. However, Jesus calls us to build His church.\(^1\) At any time, a mention of the change, older members holding leadership positions already set current strategies.

Cub Creek's current senior adult population is the strong hold foundation as it will solidify much of the leadership and decision-making. Also, within the senior leadership, monthly gatherings occur from the highly active group. While active, the group tends to promote only within and often fails to demonstrate activeness to other church members nor any attempt to outreach or grow within the community. An inward focus without an outward draw has created a stagnant presence. At Cub Creek, “most church members have forgotten what it’s like to be a first-time guest. They now have established relationships in the church. They love their church. Their biases tell them their church is great.”\(^2\) An older church without a vision continues to stick within the realms of what they know. A challenge by Jesus is, “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”\(^3\) An older sanctuary sits aside a newer, more prominent sanctuary with a near-capacity of 315 but sees a mere 60 during worship. An empty older sanctuary sits adjacent to the new sanctuary with ample opportunity for family ministry. A fellowship hall and nearly 15 acres of land complete the property with a bus, van, and trailer for ministry purposes.

The leadership consists of a senior pastor, deacon board, and church council—the Church council functions as a mixture of ministry leaders, including two paid staff. The church council meets monthly to discuss events on the calendar. The calendar runs the same every year with a lack of direction to implement any new ideas or changes to current directives. The church is not

\(^1\) Matthew 13:18. ESV.

\(^2\) Thom S. Rainer *Becoming a Welcoming Church*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.) 17.

\(^3\) 1 Corinthians 3:11 ESV.
inclined to have two pastors on staff, nor the recognition of two pastors should another paid staff member be ordained.

Other committees are vital to the church's functionality, such as personnel, nominating, church constitution, and finance. Many of these committees consist of the same members. An older generation dominates Cub Creek church demographics, with a younger generation disconnected; the older generation majority make up more than 70 percent of the church congregation. Cub Creek has an average working class of retirees, nurses, laborers, professionals, and technicians. The senior pastor's stability has provided a sense of encouragement, as the senior pastor has served more than eight years.

Cub Creek presents a welcoming environment to any guest who may come through the parking lot, finding two visitor parking spots near the main entrance. The main entrance is welcoming in a safety and cleanliness sense as one guest will discover security cameras throughout and sanitary bathrooms and floors along with empty trashcans. As a guest enters the sanctuary's main doors, two greeters are present to shake hands and provide each person a bulletin. The local church is not about catering to the cultural expectations established in the marketplace; the church’s job is to lift Jesus so seekers can see him.4

One will find on the bulletin a few announcements and service times or meetings throughout the week. An informal order of service in the publication; however, one will not find a message outline or relevant information about a series, message, or theme. The information may or may not be current or relevant. The church buys bulk copies of the front and back images on bulletin paper and will use all the copies despite any changes to the information, such as staff change.

In the foyer, a guest has easy access to bathrooms and the auditorium. Steps that lead downstairs to classes, nursery, church office, and children's ministry department are in the auditorium. No directional signs or information provide guests difficulty finding Sunday school classes spread across campus, classes held in the fellowship hall, main auditorium, and the old building.

Any guest visiting Cub Creek will have no direction for childcare, should assistance be provided for directions to the nursery or children's ministry area. At this time, no background checks on those serving in either capacity or would anyone serving have a medical release of information regarding any child. As a guest moving into the sanctuary, one will find ample seating in a quiet auditorium. Upon arriving early, the awkward silence could be challenging as the church is silent until the start of service with the bells chiming.

A welcoming hymn followed by a brief prayer leads into a direction for members and guests to fill out a connect card or "how can we serve you card." A congregational hymn follows a brief shaking hands period and offers. A choir special leads to the pastor delivering a sermon and followed by a hymn and dismissal. Should guests be present on such a day, a handshake by the pastor on the way out as each member will leave through the same door. Cub Creek lacks follow-up for any guests who may visit. A guest is asked informally about providing contact information on the connect card, a note mailed to the provided address in appreciation of the visit. The connect card is a data tool to keep records of those who visit.

The demographical content of the Moravian Falls community is vast and broad. Near the campus, a large Hispanic population is available for outreach as a church's potential mission. Three schools are within a few miles of the campus and easily accessible for outreach. The church campus sits a few miles off the main interstate going through a nearby town, Wilkesboro.
Church History

In 1862 Cub Creek began in an old one-room schoolhouse. After ten years of meeting in the school, the church joined Brushy Mountain Baptist Association; in 1888, Cub Creek built its first building. In 1944, the body elected to make a more prominent building equipped with Sunday school rooms and heating systems. An educational building was added in 1956 to include bathrooms and more Sunday school rooms. In 1974 a fellowship hall addition to the property, with extensive upgrades in 1990. A larger facility in 2001 built to hold 315 in the sanctuary and 54 in the choir. Since 2001, the church turned the focus to become debt-free and evaluate possible ways to expand the church campus. As a result of turnover in staff, Cub Creek continues to enhance the current facility and campus to accommodate the church family's needs.

Church Function

As a guest seeking to visit Cub Creek, one can find the campus by directions from the website and the road, though challenging to navigate. The church has no welcome team and utilizes greeters before worship. The greeters stand inside a closed front door to provide any visitor or member a bulletin while untrained. The current welcoming guest finds itself friendly and welcoming due to continuous efforts to greet without any new initiatives. A suggestion would be developing and training a welcome team with a vision to impact anyone who may walk through an open door.

Setting up outside and providing a welcome table inside offers an opportunity for anyone visiting to ask questions about available ministries and leave with a gift. A welcome team can provide directions for anyone seeking a small group or the nursery. A church must separate from
the everyday use of terms; terms such as sinners and visitors have caused us to alienate further those who are no different from ourselves; we’re all on a spiritual journey searching for purpose and fulfillment.\(^5\) Church signage and directions are essential to being guest-oriented. The development of a welcome team should conclude a new member's class and new believers' class. The church has been on a steady decline with no recent adult baptisms. The more recent baptisms have shown to celebrate Good News Club, community outreach to a local school, and no follow-up. Productive team meetings can create communication between ministries to excel in reaching the lost, growing the members, and align the leadership. Effective communication is an essential key to being most impactful.

The church does not reach the community through social media. Cub Creek has a social media page that runs a live feed of the worship service on Sunday morning when the senior pastor leads the service. First impressions aren’t limited to any single aspect of the guests’ experience service of any kind isn’t merely about first impressions; it’s about lasting impressions—no other communication presented through social media. The church has a functioning website that lacks week-to-week information and offers a generalized idea of the church by giving service times and a pastor's page. No other staff is on the website; however, a list of ministries shows Cub Creek's activeness. The worship service needs to adapt to a steady flow environment that is inviting. Currently, the order of service is created late Saturday night and emailed out.

Utilizing the space provided on the campus is essential for the members and anyone driving or seeking to visit. A parking lot, seemingly inviting, provides ease of access to the worship center and other buildings, along with adequate visitor parking. An older building with

an ample amount of room to build a family ministry is possible with vision. Being adjacent to the sanctuary makes for reasonable accommodations to the sanctuary. A lack of vision for the older building, currently considered an activity center, continues to haunt the local church’s growth and ministry. A fellowship hall with a full basement is available beside the sanctuary. Attached to the fellowship hall's back sits a dilapidated playground with no fencing and on a dangerous hill.

Recently two purchases to expand the property to make change the campus. One purchase made to change the parking to make the campus more accessible from the main road by clearing an old house, trees and grading the property. Cub Creek’s recent focus is to seek more roadside visibility by purchasing adjacent property to cut trees and demolish a house to seek campus parking changes to allow more visibility from the main road. In doing so, this move will allow better access and safer driving for any guest who may visit the campus and an opportunity for the current members to develop more flexible parking.

Ministries

The ministries of Cub Creek toward accommodating different age groups are available, from infant through senior adults. Primarily, the church's significant focus is the senior adult population, which are the most active.

The traditional Sunday School model is provided on Sunday morning, as is the traditional Wednesday night meeting for adults and children. The brotherhood and women on mission groups meet one Wednesday night a month. Mission groups meet on the first Wednesday night after a family night meal, which shows a limited drive to impact the community based on the numerical value of members who attend. To create an outreach opportunity, the church has a van ministry available on Sunday Mornings to pick up senior adults who cannot provide their transportation.
Throughout the summer, one can find the traditional vacation bible week and a series of concerts hosted by the senior adult ministry to reach the community. The concert series happens one time monthly for four months through the months. A lack of commitment to advertise appropriately seems to hinder the opportunity to reach the community.

Cub Creek has an established handbell ministry with available funds and people willing to participate with an appropriate candidate to lead. The handbell ministry is a vital ministry to Cub Creek, with many faithful members a part of the ministry. The ministry exists to reach the community in a unique and gifting musical way; however, it has declined for many years. The current ministry becomes a part of special services throughout the year, such as Christmas and Easter.

The children’s ministry has been a common interest and promotion of the church body as the church leaders recognize the need to influence their children. The current children’s ministry model is to reach younger families by providing a ministry to children through the traditional Sunday School and Sunday morning worship hour as a reflection of vacation bible school. A different smaller scale model is available on Wednesday Nights; children have various options from two weeks of worship and two teaching weeks. Sunday Morning and Wednesday Night services were created by a series of volunteers who do not collaborate as a team for the children’s ministry.

The student ministry meets on Sunday morning during the Sunday school hour with a small group focus. On Wednesday night, the student ministry gathers for bible study, games, and a snack. A vision by the leadership could provide a great opportunity in serving the local community for the outreach of families.
On Wednesday night, at the end of every service, a care ministry gathers to reach out to those who may be sick or dealing with loss. In the care ministry, a few women feel compelled to use their gifts in touching the hurt.

**Problem Presented**

The problem is that there is no strategic program to welcome guests at Cub Creek Church. By acknowledging the traditional roots of this church, the broken model of being community-driven. There is an apparent lack of church growth and movement that emerges from the church. This project seeks to reveal a strategy that will produce an effective way to welcome guests.

As stated on every Sunday bulletin at Cub Creek, Matthew 28:19–20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” A disciple is a whole-life learner, driven by the doctrine and lifestyle of the master. The Great Commission involves bringing people to that first moment of saving faith and teaching them wholehearted obedience to everything Christ has commanded every Christian and every local church to glorify God. Nevertheless, churches in need of revitalization almost inevitably have turned away from this commission to follow worldly pursuits. The understanding of the community as it relates to the context of the church is imperative for leadership. While the dynamics of the church may not change, the culture of the community may change. In understanding the community that a church is serving, the church must interpret the culture and needs within that will also set up the opportunity to be guest-oriented in welcoming the community.
One actual value that is often undefined in plateaued or declining churches is vision. To understand vision is to see the intersection of the pastor’s leadership, passion and gifts of the congregation, and the community needs. “In evaluating churches that are growing and healthy as well as those that are stagnant or in decline, one of the key distinctions that emerge between these categories is the existence of true vision for ministry.”

Leadership with a sense of direction on where to go and how to go will strive to go farther than a leadership striving to get by day-to-day.

Church will always decline when there is no leadership pointing them in the right direction and challenging the church. Leadership will provide much vision as well as the insight of community and congregation. The stability of staff provides one vision and one mind.

As the leadership establishes the church’s vision moving forward, the opportunities for change may present themselves. Albert Malphurs refers to small churches as, “A large number of the smaller American churches are family clan churches. They’re a small group of people who commit to taking care of one another. They may also be related to one another. While there’s nothing wrong with people caring about one another, they aren’t a church in the biblical sense. These people are missing the Great Commission; they’re not pursuing, evangelizing, and edifying lost people. These small clans exist exclusively for themselves. It’s all in-reach with no outreach.”

Making disciples to the ends of the world and the time is the work he left us to do. A disciple is a life-long learner who conformed to both the doctrine and lifestyle of following Jesus. The Great Commission involves bringing people to that first moment of saving faith and

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teaching them wholehearted obedience to everything Christ has commanded us. Every Christian and every local church can glorify God through fulfilling the great commission.

An understanding of vision to meet the community and the church where they are often mean change. Being able to address change in recognizing the community's need can present ease of mind for any congregation. Every revitalization effort must culminate in the church, transformed to embrace the vision of growing as disciples and making other developing disciples. There is no progress without change and transition, and conflict results from both.

In truth, it is not changing that causes resistance to a church moving in a new direction but rather the sense of loss experienced in the process. In revitalizing any organization, something must change, and something will be lost. Thom Rainer states, “Even small issues, such as the cleanliness of the church, parking, and signage, may have at least an implicit impact on a guest’s decision to return.”

**Purpose Statement**

This Doctor of Ministry action research thesis project aims to create a program inviting community guests to the church. By assessing the current welcoming model of Cub Creek Church, history has shown consistent growth and now a steady decline in membership. While guests have plateaued, perhaps a lack of desire to reach the community or a move inwardly focused aging congregation has settled and lost connection with those outside the walls.

There is a need to conduct a study to research the welcoming methodology of Cub Creek Church by discovering models that may be sufficient in welcoming guests and reaching the community. These guests will include a series of people within the community ranging from single young adults to families to senior adults. An ample number of guests from a more

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8 Thom Rainer. *A Simple and Highly Effective Strategy to Get Church Guests to Return.*
comprehensive age range will better respond to the questions presented. Single or young adults will have a different view of visiting a church campus than a family or a senior adult. All ages are a necessity in this research project as Cub Creek is a ministry to all ages.

This research is necessary for determining the future hospitality and welcoming to guests for Cub Creek. A purpose that will rediscover and identify methods for Cub Creek to become a welcoming church to its respective community and people. This research is necessary to discover the urgency for small rural churches to be revived starts with the dynamics of being welcoming and open to and within the community.

**Basic Assumptions**

The researcher assumes all guests attending Cub Creek Church provide truthful and honest answers to the survey questions.

The researcher assumes that Cub Creek leadership desires to become more evangelistic in reaching the local community. A reality of experience with the process will enhance the church's local ministry by creating more effective programming and invitation.

The researcher assumes Cub Creek will receive a minimum of one family visiting weekly. Also, it assumes that each family visiting will have similar faith and church backgrounds.

The researcher assumes the body of Cub Creek understands the vision and mission of the church.

The researcher assumes Cub Creek's body will be acceptable to the subjective feedback and provisional changes, as suggested by the leadership.
Definitions

The researcher will use the following definitions as described unless otherwise noted:

**Assimilate**: take in and fully understand\(^9\) One definition of assimilation is the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership.\(^10\)

**Community** - A group of people sharing common characteristics or interests.\(^11\)

**Guest** - a person to whom hospitality is extended\(^12\)

**Hospitality** - the activity or business of providing services to guests\(^13\)

**Impressions** - In this research project, impressions will be defined as a guest’s perspective unless otherwise noted.

**Leadership** – In this research project, leadership used to describe an influence exercised by any individual unless otherwise noted

**Model** - an example for imitation or emulation\(^14\)

**Revitalization** – to give new life or vigor to\(^15\)

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Vision – In this research project, vision is used to describe the church's mission, and community lived out.

Welcome - to greet hospitably and with courtesy or cordiality16

Church – a gathering of 2 or more people

Limitations

The following section is provided for the understanding of the reader to know the idea of this project. Limitations will place constraints on the researcher bearing the study—a limitation of this project found in collecting resources. Narrowing the local church's topic displays limited data to the small local community, meaning research confined to the local people. Another limitation of this project will be populated surveys provided only by participants within the community. The researcher, a familiar and former staff member, does not directly connect with the church.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this project are related to the target population. Delimitation is the restriction imposed by the researcher.

The target population will be primarily younger families with children. This researcher will provide surveys anticipating the likelihood of similar church background and faith.

Another delimitation will be a narrow topic: a narrowed topic that creates a complete challenge but a broad demand. A narrowed topic creates the delimitation of being unique to its diverse definition.

The researcher will have a limited time to accomplish the necessary criteria of the project. An estimated 10-20 will complete a survey after attending a Sunday Morning service. The designated Sunday Morning worship hour is a limitation within the parameters of those who agree to participate.

**Thesis Statement**

If a program designed to welcome guests strategically is implemented, then retention of guests may improve.

A questionnaire will gauge a range of guests from the community on their visit to Cub Creek Church. These questions will expose the whole guest experience from social media platforms and websites to follow up visitation and outreach. An in-person experience while on campus will create an opportunity for engagement among Cub Creek leaders to connect to the local community.

This study aims to gauge the interest of a panel of guests from the community on their visit to Cub Creek Church. A designed survey around a guest's vision will reveal general information to help the leadership determine an effective strategy to welcome guests and effectively reach the local community.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The literature review for this project will exhaust resources that have inclined the author to research the given topic. Other resources provide helpful insight into church revitalization, leadership, and hospitality. This chapter will display a literature review and provide theological and theoretical foundations relevant to the topic. The problem presented is both researchable and significant to church ministries. Many churches face a plateau or steady decline with little to no desire to address the standard issue.

Literature Review

In a society that needs revitalization in the church, critical decisions create change. These decisions include a church committing to look like the community because it seeks to build critical church leaders. The leaders seek to commit to pray daily for revitalization, and the church created a clear and compelling vision with a sense of urgency. Revitalization is a daunting and impossible task carried out by man alone, but with God's word and prayer, the impossibility becomes a reality. Jonathan Falwell refers to revitalization as “A church must also be an innovative church, empowering disciples to discover God’s plan for their lives and discovering what God wants His disciples to do within His church.”\textsuperscript{17} Revitalization leads to discernment and recovery of healthy congregational life. Preaching, prayer, worship, meaningful membership, church discipline, pastoral care along with dauntless, patient, but strong pastoral

\textsuperscript{17} Jonathan Falwell, ed., Innovate Church (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 96.
leadership must be our humble intention. “The term recovery used in the medical field, and that makes it appropriate for church revitalization, too, because our goal should be to have a healthy church. Today, many pastors and church leaders strive for church growth but put the cart before the horse. The objective should not be church growth, but church health, because growth must proceed from health.”18

First impressions are essential to the church; first impressions stem from a wide range of names; the philosophy is the same. This research provides necessary details to the experience a guest should receive when visiting a church. Brian Croft states, “The public gathering of the church on Sunday morning is the front door and that which most visitors first observe about a church.”19 Jared Wilson says, “over the last generation, not only has America become less Christian; but professing Christians have become less Christian, this is the result of evangelicalism’s relentless prioritization of what is useful over what is true.”20

According to the Barna group, young people think that going to church will keep their toddler from screaming the entire time, then staying home seems like a good option. Furthermore, if they find a church to be a welcoming space when their children are still toddlers, it stands to reason that they will be more likely to continue their attendance as their children grow older.21

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Hospitality

According to Lifeway Research, less than one percent of churches admit making no effort to welcome guests. Danny Franks states, “The hospitality of a church can remove hurdles to the reception of the gospel and encourage faith. Furthermore, on the flip side, a cold, unfriendly church contradicts the gospel message.”

“The hospitality ministry is a ministry of service. It is often not praised for its efforts. In many churches, the importance is overlooked by an inward focus. In some churches, it is neglected.”

“Hospitality is about caring for the emotions of the guest just as much as it is about serving them.”

According to Lifeway Research, church guests can expect to receive multiple gifts if the average pastor has anything to do with guests’ first impressions. Waltz agrees that leadership is key to wanting guests in the service, and guests provide the most crucial church growth feedback. Within the Lifeway Research, a survey by a range of protestant pastors shows a comparison of given information regarding the significant churches they serve.

A study conducted more than two years ago provides church guest services about church size. The research stated that 96% of guests have the opportunity to meet the pastor following the service. More than 50% of churches reported that their church has a common way to meet and greet guests. Less than 50% of churches provide a gift for guests. Thirty-eight percent of guests receive a mug or cup, while other everyday items were food or information packets. More than

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26 Ibid.
90% of pastors report having greeters at the church entrance; however, larger churches are more common to have greeters in the parking lot. Larger churches also have a central location for guests, whereas it is uncommon “among smaller churches.”

One debatable logistic of churches and first impressions is the comfortability of standing up to welcome guests. “The average church worship gathering sees two kinds of guests: those with a church background and those with little-to-none.”

Gary McIntosh calls a church to “guesterize” by only starting to be kind and connecting to people. Guests should be the most important people at the church on any given Sunday. Mark Waltz states, “You've got 10 minutes. Somewhere between the parking lot and the children's center, the 10 minutes pass. They should know they matter to us before they hear how much they matter to God.”

Over half of unchurched individuals agree that invitations to the church from friends or family members would be effective. In addition to that, fully one-third of unchurched people expect to attend church regularly in the future. Admittedly, many unchurched individuals do not plan to return to church and feel that invitations would be ineffective.

A church's hospitality is extended several ways beyond the Sunday morning experience into meals and small groups. Hospitality shows that a church is outreach-oriented and striving the be who God wants the church to be. Hospitality is a big part of any guest's overall experience visiting a church for the first time. When we welcome the newcomer and the least of these and


treat them as valued guests, we welcome Christ himself. Most guests have already researched and explored social media and websites before any visitation. Any website will provide adequate directions, on campus, signage pointing to convenient parking. Other ways of showing hospitality seen in worship and small groups. Being able to welcome a newcomer to a worship experience or small group alleviates some stress when visiting a place for the first time.

Hospitality reflects the community's connection; I will bring them to my holy mountain and let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

“As our American culture is so individualistic, we tend not to bother with others, assuming they can take care of themselves.” In a self-centered society, many individuals derive themselves based on what is in it for them. In Luke 9, Jesus challenges a “follow me” approach. In the American culture today, the church has established an inward focus to turn people into taking care of themselves and not imitating Jesus. America has given Christianity a negative perception due to a misconstrued message delivered by Christians. “Christianity’s image problem with a new generation is not due merely to spiritual resistance on the part of outsiders, although sometimes this plays a role.”


33 Isaiah 56:7.


and the culture—to the communities' norms and expectations. We all want to wear the right
clothes, to say the right things, to frequent the right places.”

Church Growth

According to Pew Research, the rising share of Americans who say they attend religious
services no more than a few times a year (if at all) is driven by a substantial jump in the
proportion who say they “never” go to church. Today, 17% of Americans say they never attend
religious services, up from 11% a decade ago. Similarly, the decline in regular churchgoing is
attributable to the shrinking share of Americans who say they attend religious services at least
once a week, which was 37% in 2009 and now stands at 31%.

The Bible is frustratingly vague on how to do church. A church seeking growth, first
impressions are essential to the modern church. Guests become interested in the local church by
being welcomed, before that, a warm and inviting website and signage. According to Lifeway
Research, a first-time guest’s views are often not considered by the church; being intentional and
friendly should be two constant characteristics. Guests asking about first impressions, according
to lifeway research, 83 percent of churches have information for guests to pick up or cards to fill
out, but less than two percent of guests receive any follow-up. The secret to getting guests to
come back is love. People can easily sense love—or the lack thereof. Love moves people.
Genuinely loving others is powerful. Experiencing love is the main reason the unchurched will

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38 Ibid.
come back to your church. The loving bonds of friendship that tie the church members together end up becoming barriers to those who'd like to elbow their way into the congregation.

Rainer states that signage is an essential form of communication, especially to the local community. The community is a crucial asset in church revitalization. The community exists, and a church should adapt to the community's needs as it sees fit. A community that may consist of a younger generation but has a church of an older traditional generation may struggle to see new members. When a church ceases to have a heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death. When local churches are mentioned in the New Testament, they are continually urged to be other-centered. Many churches that are in decline today are living in yesterday's moment. “Someone will quip, “If it ain’t broke, don’t ”x it!” “This calls for a strong leap of faith, as the need for and evidence in support of a new direction will not be obvious. This is a paradox. Leaders must push ahead despite the seeming evidence that the current ministry is doing well.”

A growing church can go to the community, know the community, and reach the community. Rainer states, "Nine out of ten churches in North America are losing ground in the communities in which they are. They are declining or growing more slowly than their respective communities," A church glorifies God by equipping disciples to equip disciples. A church should develop a sense of urgency to reach the lost and the community to grow and build the

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41 Thom S. Rainer. Becoming a Welcoming Church. 28.


kingdom. An essential element for a church to recognize what it needs is to recognize where it stands. Many churches will fail to grow or even seek help until the leadership realizes that the church has plateaued or declined and leads to a more significant crisis. People tend to respond poorly when faced with a lack of resources. When a church ceases to have a heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death.

A part of the church growth process for the modern-day church guests is the facilities’ physical barriers. Henard draws attention to this by saying, unfortunately, a church that is already spiritually dead does not know or may refuse the idea that the church is dead. “There are some on one side of the debate who tailor their churches for guests and try to give their community what it’s looking for in a church. Then there are those on the other side who say the church is a place for Christians. We don’t need to try to make it “seeker-friendly” because it is a gathering of believers—not an outreach to unbelievers.” Croft supports the matter of revitalization being a successful entity. An essential entity to the

Leadership

Croft states, “the front door is a public gathering of the church observed by guests.”

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49 Ibid. 57.
church is leadership. Gene Getz states, “We also looked for people who have developed the character qualities outlines by Paul: faithfully giving “of their time,” “their talents,” and “their treasures.”

Rainer draws attention to the support of a welcoming ministry by leadership that provides an opportunity to be a difference-maker. Stanley states, “It is your responsibility to see to it that the church under your care continues to function as a gathering of people in the process; a place where the curious, the unconvinced, the skeptical, the used-to-believe, and the broken, as well as the committed, informed, and sold-out come together around Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Stetzer complies with supporting factors that leadership creates practical reasons to lead through revitalization. Revitalization takes time and patience as it will not happen overnight. Implementing a strategic plan to develop a vision and mission for the church to include revitalization is an important development by the leadership. Kindle a vision for the church is a conjoint effort by all, including leadership and lay members.

Churches that lose their way and eventually forfeit spiritual vibrancy often do so due to a sloppy evaluation of those who would step up to serve. When a leader truly understands the concept of leadership, the potential to excel is higher. "When Jesus selected leaders, He ignored

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51 Thom S. Rainer Becoming a Welcoming Church. 56.


every popular idea of His day about what kind of person could fit the role. Jesus' band of disciples started untrained and without an influence-a motley group for world change."

In The Emotionally Healthy Leader, author Peter Scazzero explains what an unhealthy leader is like and discusses how to become a healthy leader. Being a healthy leader creates more and better success in all dynamics and capacities that one will lead. The growth and discipleship of a church will depend significantly on the health of the leadership. A leader can invest much time into ministry and yet lead unhealthy. Healthy leadership defines a well-balanced life, including ministry, family, and self.

A leadership that establishes a vision for the church moving forward with change may present an opportunity to impact the community. "leading major change begins with understanding what it means to exercise leadership, and learned by dissecting the definition and allowing its nuances to shape leadership practices." A leader often gets to their given position through years of experience and education; despite knowing the ins and outs of a position, lead could still be at a failure. The need is evident for revitalization and known by many though lack of leadership and the mentality to keep everything it has always done drive the church.

The study of preaching for revitalization begins by inquiring into the priority preaching has historically had in the church compared with its present place in modern philosophy of ministry. If revitalization of the church happens, then a revival of the biblical pulpit must


56 Michael F. Ross. Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize your Church through your Pulpit (Gannies House, Scotland: Mentor. 2006.) Pg.29.
occur, necessitating a preaching reformation. If reformation occurs, the priority and proper place of preaching must be realized and reasserted by those who preach. ⁵⁷

To see a dying church that is blinded by what they use to create much frustration and prayer is currently the single best method to seek an opportunity for change. “Prayer is not merely a task of ministry; it is a gauge that exposes our hearts’ condition. It unveils our pride, showing us whether we believe we are powerless apart from God. When we pray, it is an expression of surrender to God and reliance on His infinite wisdom and sovereignty.” ⁵⁸

Davis refers to visionary leadership⁵⁹ Visionary leadership is vital in all churches for them to bear maximum fruit for God's glory. But it is especially essential in church revitalization situations.⁶⁰ A godly visionary leader relies on Scripture and, by faith, sees God's timeless truths and of his plans and purposes for all Christians generally. The revitalizing leader can apply the timeless scriptural vision of God and his purposes in the world to a specific local church and its calling in that community.⁶¹

Effective leadership creates the opportunity for the church to see what pieces will make it successful. Whoever leads a change through meaningful change can expect obstacles and critics.⁶²

Effective leadership creates the opportunity for the church to see what pieces will make it successful. Whoever leads a change through meaningful change can expect obstacles and critics.⁶² Every church should be inviting and influential to the community. The impact of leadership is crucial to the health and growth of a church body. A guest of a church may often be

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⁵⁷ Ibid. pg.39.

⁵⁸ Francis Chan. Letters to the Church. (David C. Cook, 2018.) 157.


broken in sin and seeking guidance; the outlying effort that a body of Christ makes to welcome such guest is crucial on the impact and return of that guest. This impact is essential to the development of leadership. The vital component of leadership, especially when implementing any change, is prayer. Dave Early instructs leaders to pray for those whom they and to teach them to pray.63

Church Model

Rainer concludes that churches perceive their friendliness based on how friendly they are to one another.64 Many churches fail to consider a first-time guest. A biased opinion from a church member is often misleading to the first-time guest. The church member often forgets the misleading perspective to understand what it means to be a first-time guest. However, church members and leaders are often wrong. Guests are often most overlooked right before service begins. Most members will not have the effort to greet a guest during this time. When a guest visits, they have more than likely found something impressing that made them visit.

A guest will more than likely have already explored the church website and checked out the campus to get information before their visit. Many guests will seek out messages preached and the music to see if it draws attention. Any single greeter should understand a guest's mindset and not have the mindset of being told to greet. A centrally located and easy-to-finding information center providing an abundance of information is essential to have as a guest arrives on campus. As a family on vacation, guests are seeking formative information that is simple to find.


64 Rainer. Becoming a Welcoming Church. 17.
A church should have a weekly assignment to ensure that guests see Christ. "The local church is not about catering to the cultural expectations established in the marketplace; the church's job is to lift Jesus so seekers can see him."65 A church with an established vision is looking at the moment and the future. "The vision tells us who we are and are going to be, the mission clarifies the action of our vision, and now the strategy offers the specifics of how the church will accomplish these things."66

As a guest enters campus, many questions occur. An information center is essential as it provides the necessary information and directions for any guest. Some of the vital information a guest may consider is the ministries offered by the church. Some of the critical ministry information components should include family ministry, community outreach and membership.

Online Church

One key component for today's church is the accessibility of reaching the next generation—the next generation driven by technology. The generation is between the ages of 10 and 30; the digital world now has new and more innovative ways of interaction and socialization.

Today the digital world allows for flexibility and remote options. The digital world has created many changes to the traditional world by developing many key features while shrinking others. The internet has created ways for the church to reach people worldwide and impact all cultures and communities within their unique desire. Stephen Spyker states, " In a nutshell, technology is part of what defines us; it is part of what makes us human. More than that, the technologies we adopt affect the same type of humans we become. The tools we choose to use

65 Waltz, First Impressions. 29.

and how we use them affect how we think, how we make a decision, how we relate to one another, how we construct knowledge, even how we think about God.\textsuperscript{67} Being driven by technology can have benefits and also consequences.

Walter Wilson says, "Continue to do the same old things, and you’ll get the same old results. Try to see the future. We are moving into a world that requires that we do things very differently. The unchurched will remain unchurched. Don’t expect them to show up at your door. Create a network that reaches out to their world and asks God to begin touching their lives. He will. We need only declare His Word. His Spirit will leverage the Internet for the advantage of the kingdom."\textsuperscript{68}

**Theological Foundations**

The theological foundation of the thesis found in Galatians, "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus."\textsuperscript{69} Another common foundation will be from Matthew, “For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect; therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”\textsuperscript{70} “You don’t have to be smart to be faithful; you


\textsuperscript{69} Galatians 3:28, CSB.

\textsuperscript{70} Matthew 5:46-48.
don’t have to be talented or gifted. Faithfulness is something very down-to-earth, and every one of us can be faithful in the sphere God has given us. Also, in the book of Matthew,

“You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Jesus said in Revelation 2 to the church of Ephesus.

"I know your works, your labor, and your endurance and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.”

In this passage, Jesus makes it clear the path to a new life for a dying church is repentance. This repentance is relating to the foundation of the church. The church in the community reflects God. When the church is struggling, so is God's reputation in that community. The new digital world has provided a new definition to a community with indirect access worldwide. The community context within the Christian culture carries a higher value than simply considering

To lead a revitalization effort, leadership is a critical component. In the Bible, leadership is the overarching context of spiritual autonomy. Spiritual Leaders in the Old Testament and the New Testament seek God's will and the ability to communicate and teach it. Jesus attracted followers in large and small by being an example. Leadership is intended for service. God gives a clear picture of those who lead the church. Paul gave the instructions to Timothy and

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72 Matthew 5:16, CSB.

73 Revelation 2:2-5, CSB.

74 Luke 22:26
specified the qualification. Paul challenges the overseer in the book of 1 Timothy to do excellent work and continues to end the exact text for a deacon to be of high standing and great confidence. The characteristics lay a foundation of godly life today for anyone serving as a pastor or deacon capacity.

First, church revitalization is found in Matthew's book when he promises to build His church. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth is already loosed in heaven.”75 Jesus says that our exceeding righteousness should be evident in our desires.76 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly”77 It is evident in Matthew that people matter to God; therefore, people should matter to the church. If the local church is faithful followers of Jesus, the church should model the same communication to the community and guests. The community and guests should experience acceptance and know they are valued. Being valued and accepted is the development of an authentic relationship. Matthew 11:28 is an indicator of an accurate explanation of Jesus as he says, "Come to Me." The revitalization of a local church is a multifaceted commission. Consider the charge from the book of 2 Timothy.

75 Matthew 16:13-20.


"I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside myths. But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."  

A community defined as a "group of people sharing common characteristics" is typically considered living among each other in a common area. The internet has exploited this historical idea with no limitations geographically. A church, however, should be a community formed by the Word of God. A community formed by the Word of God is visibly seen in awe of God. A humbling experience for any community outsider or visitor. A community that will raise to reach those outsiders will glorify God in doing so as God designs the church to be a generous people who believe that God has provided time and resources to be used for others’ good.

Second, Jesus calls for the church to go. The Great Commission to the Church, Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The Great Commission to the Church mentioned in the book of Mattheus is the climax of the book. Jesus passes the torch to his disciples and promises to be with them forever.

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78 2 Timothy 4:1-5.
According to a recent Barna study, only 51% of U.S. Churchgoers say they do not know the term “The Great Commission.”81 The church has a crucial responsibility to be commissioned to reach the community; however, a lack of commitment has declined a dying church's influence in their respective communities. When Jesus told Peter his vision to grow a church, the intentions are strong.

Third, the book of Romans challenges people to share hospitality.82 One commentary says, “Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.”83 Luke reiterates the same command by calling believers to give84 Hospitality to not be neglected or grumpy toward showing it.85 The New Testament vocabulary for hospitality derived from the Greek root Xen, strange.86 Henard states, "the word hospitality, used in scripture, means "a love of strangers."87 The New Testament is a challenge for the community and church to love each other. Two great words of the original language are to love and care for each other. But only what is suitable for building up someone in need so that it gives grace to those who hear88 Through hospitality, the church shows the community love and care. How does the church demonstrate the character of God to a broken community knowing persecution may be presented?


82 Romans 12:13.


85 1 Peter 4:9.


88 Ephesians 4:29
The concept of hospitality was found to be practical in both the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, consider Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to the three visitors in the book of Genesis.

“Then the LORD appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting in the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. He looked up, and he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them and bowed to the ground. Then he said, “My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, please do not go on past your servant.” – Genesis 18: 1-3 (CSB)

Abraham displayed the necessity of hospitality for unity in Christ; Hospitality plays no small role in the scriptures. Early Christian leaders practiced hospitality, proclaiming the attribution to God. Many forms of hospitality are seen throughout the scriptures, including the reception of others into their homes. Throughout the Old Testament, several customs show hospitality, including greeting travelers, washing their feet, providing food and drink for them and their animals, and offering them a place to stay.

One of the most well-known images in all scripture for Church revitalization is the passage from Ezekiel 37.89 This passage reveals the true power of God and proves He will do what He promises, even raising a dying church. Ezekiel’s primary purpose was not to teach a doctrine of the resurrection. The primary purpose of the vision was the restoration of Israel.90 Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones vividly portrayed Israel’s miraculous restoration. In this vision, the prophet saw a valley full of dry, disconnected bones, representing Israel's scattered people.91 Just as a breath of life entered into a corpse and a multitude of living beings stood in the valley,


in the same way, Jesus can bring life to a dying church. The power of God revitalizes a church. As Ezekiel's dead bones have zero possibility of knowing life again, many churches find themselves with the same thought. “If there are two primary marks of churches needing revitalization, it would arguably be the absence of spiritual life and the presence of hostile division among those in the church. Either of these realities can single-handedly kill a church over time, but when both are present, death is imminent.”

A conviction for the church is the understanding of regeneration. A regenerated church is made up of people surrendering themselves to Church with a common faith and communion. Regeneration is the beginning of the Christian life of fellowship with God as heavenly Father, a fellowship characterized by freedom from fear and loving gratitude. One sign of regeneration in a church is baptism. Believer's baptism, being a public profession of faith, gives evidence of regeneration in the person, church, and community by creating a foundation. The church's discipline to win a straying lost soul is an essential part of the church.

A biblical doctrine that strongly supports assimilation is the believer's priesthood is the teaching that all believers are meant to be ministers and servants. It is not reserved for only the vocational pastor but includes every believer as part of the royal priesthood. To minister to another means to serve another and once a new member is taught this concept through assimilation, he will begin to serve, and the ministry of the church will expand and prosper. It

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95 1 Peter 1:9
seems the church has assumed, to its demise, that a member will become a champion for Christ by osmosis.\textsuperscript{96}

Throughout church history, believers have been persecuted, but God has called all believers to love those who even persecute. The word \textit{koinonia} is a more precise definition sense of community. In modern society, an online community is often simulated as part of the church body showing a change in the hospitality and how the community is defined. In the book of Acts, a clear depiction of care and community is seen within the church. The early church shared devotion to caring for those in dire need. We find in Acts 2:

Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. They devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex every day and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day, the Lord added to them those who were being saved.\textsuperscript{97}

**Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical foundations for this research are rooted deeply within the context of the researcher’s experience and role in the local church. The local church's purpose is to reach the local community, yet this research is seen as a diminishing effort to welcome guests by the local church to those who are visiting guests. As part of a church revitalization effort, guests' critical decision being a focal point is derivative based on the local church looking outward. Much of the research founded considering welcoming guests overshadow the smaller churches in smaller communities.

In research, the context of church revitalization and church assimilation surround larger gatherings. While, at the time, the dynamics of the church body was a steady decline, but the

\textsuperscript{96} Douglas K. Tanner \textit{from Visitor to Minister.} 2005.  
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1408&context=doctoral

\textsuperscript{97} Acts 2:44-47

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numbers are steady well about the average small church setting. Theoretically, research methodology in larger-scale church bodies can be utilized in a smaller rural church.

Community Demographics

In the local community, many small churches are available. The community's demographics are widely spreading among the Hispanic population—a rural community located on the outskirts of a bigger town primarily made up of lower-income families. Theoretically, the development of guest services to implement the community's Spanish-speaking population would expand outreach and growth. While no one church can be culturally neutral, communication with a different culture will challenge modern society. David Platt states, “We too often speak in dismal terms about how hard it is to reach this or that kind of person in our culture today or in cultures around the world.”98 Being willing to reach the culture is vital as no unchurched person will step into a church voluntarily. Many churches are already touching far more people than they realize.99

Another demographic is the unique location of the church campus, being within walking distance of several schools. A striving and healthy family ministry with promotion could draw in a range of guests who constantly drive by the campus going to the local schools.

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Church Guests

In a church revitalization process, the guests of a church must be a top concern. Church guests are essential to the growth of the body. Each community is diverse and unique in its way. A church should seek to understand the community's diversity to create better ways to reach the community. A church should not seek to change the community but seek ways to reach those in the community. Rainer referenced 80 percent of church visitors rank invitation from a friend, family member, or coworker as the most common motivation for visiting a church.\footnote{100 Thom S. Rainer. High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 91.}

For Cub Creek to fully engage in becoming a welcoming church to the community’s guests, a strong push from the leadership must be desirable. Theoretically, evidence has been revealed of church growth through a change in developing a strategic plan to welcome guests. A directive to change inward focus to outward through the leadership's supplication will be essential.

The key elements that are seen through a progressive change in welcoming guests create many opportunities. However, we ignore the church as the church functions more on self-reliant and self-sufficient people in our independence.\footnote{101 Mark Dever, Nine Marks of a Healthy Church (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 16.} For Cub Creek to see a comeback, a foundation established will be crucial. The church strives to fulfill the great commission as partial to an unimplemented vision. In Ephesians 5:25, Jesus loved the church and gave himself for the church. Matthew 16:18 declares that Jesus stated he would build "My Church." A foundation should stem, theoretically, from scripture and uphold biblical principles. These biblical principles should expound on the authority of the scriptures. Another essential element in
the biblical leadership of the church. The church needs to hear, read, study, and apply God's Word to everyday living. Churches are called to the mission of propagating the gospel.

Walter Kaiser, a great Old Testament scholar, said,

“Many pastors can preach whole messages with little more than a tip of the hat to a clause or two taken from a biblical context that few, if any, recognize. Pastors have decided that using the Bible is a handicap for meeting the different generations' needs. Therefore, they have gone to drawing their sermons from the plethora of recovery and pop psychology books that fill our Christian bookstores. The market forces demand that we give them what they want to hear if we wish them to return and pay for the mega sanctuaries that we have built. Even when the Word confronts us, challenges us, and threatens our ideals in the American dream, let’s embrace it.”

A key focus for any church seeking change is the development of assimilation. One assimilation suggests that "Churches monitor many different metrics to determine the health of their church." Theoretically, identifying and monitoring the effectiveness of strategically implemented plans will allow for integration between the church and community—a lack of awareness concerning the community that leads to a roadblock in evangelism. The daunting move in any church is changing; change is difficult for any party. Making small shifts to allow the church to see progress and celebrate the victory may allow big things to happen with the leadership.

Theoretically, Cub Creek has several options to pursue when seeking a more solidifying foundation for guest connections. When accessing the connectedness to guess, Cub Creek could consider five ideas to remove the guesswork. Turning first-time guests into church members is a spiritual responsibility for the church and leadership.

102 Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson. Comeback Churches. 35.


Idea one: An inviting experience for guests

Any guest visiting is seeking reasons to return. A guest who enters the church campus in today’s digital society is considered a plus as background research has likely already been completed. First time guest utilizes social media and web-based platforms as a baseline decision on determining their first visit. Once on campus, guests are likely seeking the next “wow” movement should they return. Often, a ministry can grow stagnant and get into a routine. Being creative and mixing up the welcoming piece creates an intuitive way of thinking to eliminate guests’ decline. Any first-time guests may seek church signage to find the church campus in the community despite GPS use. Church signage provides a sense of promotion to the community.

Any guests arriving on campus will be getting a panoramic view of the campus to determine the next steps. Guests will be looking for parking spots that are easy to access and accommodating to first-time guests. A trained and well-equipped welcome team member at each entrance is simple and a money-saving experience for the church and an excellent experience for the first-time guests to feel welcomed. Being able to create that extraordinary experience coming onto the church campus will open the doors for life-changing relationships and provide an opportunity to come “home.” Guests should ultimately feel comfortable and safe.

Idea two: A clear theology

The center of all churches should be biblical and practical preaching. A clear and precise message is vital to all people present. Being theological sound is vital, but theological understanding is essential to knowing the audience likely didn’t go to seminary. Being sound and clear will eliminate any confusion; guests are more likely to return if they are left with a message they could retain. Guests will learn who God is by learning who Jesus is. Jesus leaves no doubt
about who he is. A clear theology comes with a definite purpose. A community-driven church will be motivated to pursue a vision and invest in the future. A passion and understanding of the Great Commission will be evident by guests returning as the church strives with a reason to reach people and change lives. God speaks to people through the preached word. Through God’s inerrant and infallible Word, the church sees and knows Jesus’ authority over all things. God’s word is actively living, and teaching is profitable to those who are in the presence of the teaching.

**Idea three: People minded leadership**

Leadership needs a sense of being humble, genuine, and approachable. First-time impressions are a vital component of leadership as a first-time guest will be gauging their meet and greet with any staff or leadership. Pastors should be present and visible among the flock they shepherd by hanging out at a guest connections center after service or noting their availability. Often a recorded welcome video on social media and website provides a sense of personality for any leader. A welcome team should consist of passionate members who bring a positive and attractive attitude, who are = willing to carry out the ministry well. A welcoming team with the desire to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others more than yourselves.” An established foundation of teaching will be prevalent to a solid church. The foundation is built upon through steady leadership that demonstrates the distinction of the teachings of the scripture. In Biblical Church Revitalization states,

“For a dying, divided church to find life again, it must know who to follow. It isn’t the family who has been there the longest or has given the most money to the building campaign. It isn’t the staff person who has the longest tenure. God’s design is for there to be two offices of pastors and deacons, two offices distinct

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105 John 14:9
106 Philippians 2:3
from each other, both of which know their roles and seek to serve in them with all their might. There are all kinds of leaders in the local church.”

Ministry leaders must have a servant’s heart, as addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians:

“Now, the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

An active leadership should be diverse of ages, genders, and cultures. A church desiring to revitalize should promote positive leaders and not necessarily who the church has been truly following. A dying church seeking to find life again must know who to follow and steer away from family who has been there or provides the most money.

Idea four: A healthy family ministry

A healthy family ministry from nursery through high school and even college is often a deciding factor for any family. Often the children are referred to as the church of tomorrow, while others instill as children being the church of today. A healthy family ministry has several fundamental dynamics, including enjoyable and safe. Often a healthy family ministry is a deal-breaker for visiting families with children. A healthy church resembles a family. It is healthy for a family to experience the love of God with a committed Church family. Families are interested in how their kids will be discipled. One of the top reasons people return to church is developing a family and the desire to see their kids raised in a church.

\[^{107}\text{Croft, Biblical Church Revitalization. 101.}\]

\[^{108}\text{1 Corinthians 12:14-20.}\]
A family ministry is a measurable success or failure. It is easily adaptable to develop strategies that will drive continual improvement. One priority for family ministry is the discipleship process in the home. It is common among churches to see a wealth of kids running in the children’s ministry, but parents are nowhere to be seen. The retention of those kids once older decreases tremendously due to a lack of interest by parents. Parents may see a children’s ministry as a babysitting service instead of an opportunity for them to be disciples.

**Idea five: An authentic worship**

Church guests may not be drawn to a particular worship style as much as they are drawn to quality and engagement; a lethargic worship experience is often seen as congregations going through the motions week in and week out. Authentic worship may be driven by practice and preparation. Guests will observe the service flow and be turned away with open holes in a service that lacks preparation. For some, the entire experience is as necessary as the message heard. A church functions as a living organism and has a natural ability to grow. A healthy growth rate in worship attendance is 7 percent or more each year.\(^\text{109}\) Worship is seen as the climax of the relational connection to Christ.

Being authentic is to be genuine. A level of intimacy will be seen and heard by any guests walking into a worship service. Being authentic is also being dynamic or moving; people today are looking for moving encounters. Dynamic worship is always a moving and changing environment that presents a genuine connection between the people and God. A feeling of nostalgia is often seen among churches with an inward focus because of the lack of true worship. The worship experience is beyond the sermon and the music alone. For the first time, a guest

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walking into a worship center may be intimidated by awkward silence or music heard at a funeral service.

Summary

While a significant amount of research is available for church revitalization and relevant to guests’ relations, this research effort is limited to a small rural church and conjunctural relations to comparative research. An efficient church revitalization process is goal-oriented with a strategic plan to move forward. These five ideas can provide a simplistic foundation for any church to seek a revitalization process though keeping in mind that it is essential to trust the process and know the process takes time. The process will develop over time, although struggles will occur. Two critical components of revitalization are evangelism and discipleship; these two components factor into all five ideas.

In Christ, the body of the church finds its strength despite any revelation of weaknesses. Churches seeking to revitalize don’t need willing but courageous people and find an identity in Christ. These people and leaders have the identity in Christ to embrace humanity, weakness, and failure. Churches that need revitalization are simply absent of the spiritual life and have a hostile division among the people.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter addresses the methodology of the thesis project. Two sections divide Chapter Three. Intervention design and the design's implementation will highlight the research structure and outline the study's methodology. The model of being able to collect the necessary data will be in phases.

The review of the literature provides insightful information regarding church and guests. Being able to welcome guests is imperative to seeing growth in modern society. How guests perceive the church leadership is valued. Being a welcoming church starts from outside the walls and includes updated information on social media and websites. Appropriate signage and direction help guests find their way. Safety is highly valued today among churches and perceived as a priority among families.

Intervention Design

This research's primary purpose was to identify the method of guests being welcomed to Cub Creek Church. The survey revealed cooperative data from a diverse range of community participants who were willing during a pandemic to voice practical information on how perceiving guests were to the visit at Cub Creek.

Revitalization takes time and patience as it will not happen overnight. Implementing a strategic plan to develop a vision for the church to be welcoming includes revitalization as significant leadership development. Kindle a vision for the church is a conjoint effort by all, including leadership and lay members. Churches that lose their way and eventually forfeit spiritual vibrancy often do so due to a messy evaluation of those who would step up to serve.
Church Revitalization involves bringing life to dying churches by dealing with the various causes of decline.

It is identifying Cub Creek's strategies to reach a diverse community with a range of demographics successfully. While a range of diverse demographics presents its complexity of outreach, any willing congregation could be presented with a wide range of outreach options. Cub Creek sits in a unique community with ample opportunity surrounding the community. Cub Creek sits in the Moravian Falls community in the center of Wilkes County, North Carolina.

Wilkes County has an overall population of 68,412\textsuperscript{110} according to the most recent census. Wilkes County's demographics are 92.7% White alone, 4.7% African American and 6.9% Hispanic. More than 22% of the total population is over 65, while 20.1% is under 18. The estimated population of Moravian Falls is nearly 2000, with a median age of 55 years old. The largest ethnic groups in Moravian Falls are 80% white, 14% Hispanic, 4% African American and 2% other.

One phase will be to create a welcome team with those who have a heart and desire to connect with guests. Establishing a core team will allow positive enforcement in creating a welcoming environment by exploring the necessary needs. The team comprises several people willing to welcome guests and know the church facilities and the ministries' ins and outs. Identifying those participants ready to serve on a team should be carefully carried out. Team members must have outgoing personalities and the ability to attract others. Collaborating at an initial meeting will allow the team to filter through the church's welcoming process. The team should explore and elaborate on all social media and website information the church offers. The

\textsuperscript{110} "U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Wilkes County, North Carolina". Census Bureau Quickfacts, Last modified 2020.
team should continue to explore the guest's parking and signage from the road to inside the facilities.

Another team initiative will explore church safety and cleanliness—a second meeting set to explore options of establishing a flexible welcoming area for guests upon arrival. A guest area should include accurate ministry information and mapping of the facilities. Other options would be to provide first-time guests with more detailed information such as branded material or recent sermon series and worship services. Adequate guest service is the imperative element that will be determining accuracy and effectiveness. The efficiency and effectiveness of guest retention shown by continued growth and being outwardly driven. A communication component is essential throughout the entire flow of a guest visiting a church.

Identifying if a church is welcoming to guests can be determined by evaluating current guests and retention by obtaining recent new members' information. A research study to assess how welcoming the church will present a list of willing participants. These participants will be selected in the community to visit the church and answer a series of questions about the church's guest services. These questions will include identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the model for welcoming guests. Identifying the perception of a guest exposes the friendliness of the church. Being able to survey selected participants can reveal results to a team to expound upon a needed direction.

A proposed outcome of the intervention will be seeing the positive engagement of church leaders and members developing an appropriate guest service for welcoming guests. A functioning team excited about welcoming guests to the church will strengthen the church's ability to reach the community. A successful outcome of this project will expose the church's weakness but impose the member's and leadership's strengths in their willingness to see growth.
COVID-19

In March 2020, COVID 19 struck an ever-changing process for the global church. The pandemic created change in a unique manner that was unforeseen but forced creativity in gatherings. Considering a worldwide pandemic, Cub Creek Church was presented with coronavirus's adverse challenges, also known as COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 had a significant impact on the research project. While scheduling was difficult for participants to attend, an accurate depiction of a visit may have been distorted due to restrictions during their scheduled time. However, the restrictions of COVID-19 created opportunities for Cub Creek and the local church to reach the community.

Being adversely affected by a worldwide pandemic in the coronavirus creates new ideologies for the church to reach the communities. Productivity in a dying church is challenging; a factor in a pandemic's impact could present an overwhelming desire not to get things done. In an unforeseen season, maintaining a routine is not halted. The world is now a different place and the community surrounding is out of sorts. The church must adapt; priority becomes of the essence. Suddenly, a crisis has now disrupted the flow of church and has been forced to be recalibrated. To turn the focus to what matters, it must become imperative for the church to strategize a plan and explore the best chances for success.

Though Cub Creek is adversely affected by a worldwide pandemic, new challenges will be present. Included in those challenges will be the change of online church. A new realm of the online church is now upon the church. The pandemic has created a new opportunity for the church to reach the community around it. A new intervention will allow a great opportunity as the online church unveils and creates new ways to fulfill the great commission.
The proposed completion time for a participant was one hour which included the service time during their visitation. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, participants provided more understanding in their pre-visit, eluding scheduling conflicts and misinformed times for any guests. However, the restrictions exposed the cleanliness of the church. Once the anonymous surveys were completed, and appreciation was sent to all participants. The researcher gathered the data and complied with all answers collectively.

Despite the pandemic having a significant impact on the global church, the pandemic allowed the global church to become more diverse in reaching the community. The growth of the online church was an inevitable occurrence throughout the pandemic. Cub Creek's strategic plan to implement the online church as part of the weekly service will precede the local people’s growth and outreach.

Identifying the Problem

Cub Creek has an outdated website with irrelevant information. It is apparent that Cub Creek identifies their primary platform for online connections as Facebook; however, there is no link on the page nor indications they have a Facebook page from their website. While having an active online platform, not all members desire to access Facebook instead of general web browsing. The website provides a welcome message from the pastor and limited information regarding different ministries. The website does give an address and phone number; the Facebook page differs information from the website. The Facebook page provides weekly videos of the worship service.

Any first-time guests arriving on campus at Cub Creek will find the campus on a busy road off the main interstate minimal directions are provided. Still, signs are presently directing
any guests to the campus. One sign is present on campus and may highlight an upcoming event or share a recent event. Once on campus, two guests’ spots are available near handicap parking at the main facility’s front. No parking or welcoming team is present; a greeter will be present at the main door with no directional signage or information center.

Cub Creek Church has a current welcoming guest’s model by having greeters stand at the door before a traditional worship service. While the greeters are friendly in appearance, it is shocking for the first-time guest to enter a door to experience being embraced by greeters. A guest was greeted with a handshake and a bulletin providing little details regarding the church. A clean foyer leading to an open sanctuary is easy to access; however, there is no direction for nursery or children.

During worship service, guests were asked to fill out a connect card and place it on a plate passed by an usher. The connect card is used for information purposes only; there is no follow-up, nor is there any information provided for present guests. At times, there is no clear flow of the worship service, leaving members and guests alike in the question of awkward moments. A stand and greet approach are often very lengthy, allowing members to catch up but guests a time to be vulnerable and isolated. Any family visiting will be challenged to find the nursery or children’s area. Both areas are located downstairs with no direction pointing family in the direction nor any indication of safety parameters. Any child visiting will come as they have no information provided to the family or the workers. Other areas of interest for visiting families may include ease of access to playgrounds and traffic direction on campus.

After the worship, any guests will be provided an opportunity to shake the pastor's hand on the way out. Other members may take time to acknowledge guests on campus to appreciate their visit. Any post-visit follow-up may include a phone call from the pastor to show
appreciation of the visit. No, follow-up will be made if guests don’t complete a connect card and place it on the offering plate.

A strategic plan to build up and promote healthy children and student ministry is essential in reaching a core population. By evaluating Cub Creek's community and the prime location within the local schools, a top priority of outreach should be reaching families with children. Outdated children and student ministry is not inviting for any family. Many families seek the opportunity to join a church family with a healthy core child and student ministry. A healthy child and student ministry begin with the nursery. A family has a far more chance of joining a vibrant ministry for nursery through students than not. The survey participants will look at the dynamics and expose how inviting Cub Creek is for families. A few components that a family with young children may look at will be primarily safety. The safety features will include playground, check-in and check-out features, volunteer numbers and background checks.

Liberty University Institutional Review Board

A series of the task were completed leading to the plan. The project's first step was to implement a plan by gauging the leadership's interest at Cub Creek, who granted permission to complete such a project. Following permission, an IRB application is completed, and IRB approval is received before the research protocol.111

IRB approval must be granted for research to be completed. The submission for approval includes all elements of the project. The details about this project are stated and available for review within this chapter. The details include recruitment, survey, consent, and IRB approval.

Following approval of criteria for research, the researcher collectively gathered willing participants of various demographic backgrounds. These backgrounds ranged from singles to

111 See Appendix D
families to the elderly. After consent to participate, participants received an email detailing instructions and consent form to participate; upon retrieval of the consent form, the researcher and participant(s) scheduled a date for visitation to Cub Creek. Once the researcher verified confirmation of visit, a participant was provided a link to an anonymous survey for completion.

This research effort required a survey to effectively measure Cub Creek's commitment to the local community by questioning local participants willing to visit the church. These survey questions will have a threefold approach as the questions pertain to one who will visit as a guest to Cub Creek. A guest, according to research, will most likely decide to visit a local or new church based on outside sources unless there may be a direct connection, such as a friend or family. Being able to gauge questions before, during, and after service will help identify the visit's strengths and weaknesses.

**Implementation of Intervention Design**

The section will outline the methodology implemented by the researcher. This researcher implemented a plan to introduce an anonymous survey to prospective participants from within the Cub Creek community to visit as guests at Cub Creek Church. The driving questions to implement a complete research effort included:

1. Do Cub Creek's welcoming guests' efforts equate to parallel research of similar churches through quantitative analysis?

2. Are there empirical differences between Cub Creek and similar churches?

3. What strategic plan outcome from qualitative research with community participants while visiting Cub Creek?
Quantitative Research

In comparison analysis, comparable churches and research were identified. Lifeway research completed a similar survey among a broader range of churches and pastors in 2017. The research provided substantial evidence for welcoming guests comparable to the size of Cub Creek. When evaluating the wide range of research for guests’ relations, cross-referencing the dynamics of culture within the communities should be included. Every Church sends a message on the way guests are welcomed and treated. Many churches need a wake-up call in their approach of welcoming guests, while other approaches are essentially non-existent. Churches are not as healthy as their leaders think they may be. Thom Rainer states, “Churches perceive they are a friendly church because the members are friendly to one another.”

Qualitative Research

By completing an anonymous survey among a group of willing participants helped identify specific reasons for welcoming guests. Though the participants completed an anonymous survey, the selection process was to volunteer and be selected based on age range. Three separate age ranges were utilized to identify more specific details better. The subcategories included:

- The young and single generation
- Families
- Older adults

This researcher identified the participants by way of outreach for support. Once all participants were identified, this researcher revealed the necessary paperwork and provided a list

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112 Rainer. *Becoming a Welcoming Church*. 17.
of dates over the summer of 2020 to attend Cub Creek. After the date range ended, participants were contacted with a link to a survey monkey. Upon completion, this researcher analyzed the questionnaire results regarding the participant's visit to Cub Creek. Appendix A indicates a series of questions the participants were presented. These questions focus on three different parameters of a guest visit to Cub Creek.

**Pre-visit**

- Were you able to access Cub Creek Church on social media? What information was available to you? (staff, beliefs, ministries, directions, etc.)
- How did you acquire the directions to Cub Creek Church? What type of signs helped in building you to Cub Creek Church?
- When you arrived, is guest parking available to you? How is the parking lot adequately lined to direct you? How would you describe the upkeep of the campus?
- Did you locate any safety features that made your visit more accommodating?

The pre-visit questions pertain to the guests' completion of background information checks by evaluating social media platforms, websites, directions, signage, and safety features upon arrival. This section is essential as most guests will likely have determined their planned visit byways of research. Other guests will show by word of mouth and invitation. This section privates a foundation in understanding what guests first encounter before they arrive on campus and as they arrive on campus. Though a decision may not be based on the campus's upkeep, a well-kept promotes a more inviting environment. Different guests will look for different safety
parameters. Any family that arrives may look for playgrounds and accommodations for children, while seniors will look for handicap accessible features.

**Visit**

- Where you greeted in the parking lot or as you entered the church building? What information was provided to you as a guest? If so, were they equipped to answer questions and/or guide you to where you needed to go?
- Is there directional signage leading you to the worship center and other buildings on campus? Did you locate the bathrooms, nursery, children’s ministry?
- How was the facility inviting to you? Is the facility clean and inviting?
- Is there directional signage inside the worship center leading you to other parts of the building?
- How do you describe the flow of the worship service? Were guests welcomed by other members? Did the pastor ask about guest’s connections?
- What are the safety parameters for the church members/guests visiting?

The visit questions included actions that took place while on campus and visiting a worship service. Many of these questions will challenge a guest on their opinion of making a return visit or not. These core questions should primarily be taken into consideration upon the implementation of a guest’s connection team. These questions were developed on the vision of a guest walking into the worship center. These questions will quickly expose a facility's welcome features from an information center to bathrooms and campus layouts. Other safety parameters are asked about that may include sanitary reasons and children's ministry check-ins.
Post-visit

• Did Cub Creek Church provide guests with follow-up information and/or provided a gift?

• Were you satisfied with your experience as a guest? What measures would you take to return to Cub Creek? What, if anything, would you add to your experience?

The post-visit questions pertain to any follow-up completing by Cub Creek and the overall satisfaction of the visit. This section allows a guest to chime in on what their experience was. An opportunity to expound on what a guest liked or did not like about the visit. Also, it reveals the importance of guest relations after a guest comes to visit.

A church seeking growth should be a key component seen by any guest visiting as it creates a more dire need for being welcomed. The first impressions should be simple but warm and inviting. Any guest visiting for the first time will retain how they were received and what their experience was as a visitor. The key to retaining guests is the simple complexity of loving one another. The component of love should be widely visible to any guest visiting for the first time or returning. A genuine return of love for any guests visiting Cub Creek should take front-row presence. A guest visiting will identify the experience of love, an established and well-trained welcome team of volunteers can create the ultimate experience for guests coming into the church from the community.

The digital world has been exposed through the impact of the pandemic. The exposure of flexibility and being remote has now become more desirable among church guests and even members. Cub Creek admittingly lives as a church that doesn’t look far into the future and keeps doing the same old things that result in the same old results. During the pandemic, Bara Group
completed a survey of adults that attend online services. Barna surveyed more than 500 willing participants, and 40% of those participants stated they had streamed their regular church online; 23% of those participants stated they streamed a different church while 48% stated neither. The dynamics of the pandemic have created a new look for worship service as it continues to unfold.

A difference-maker in ministry is found within the leadership and the willing capability to identify the support of being a successful entity. Revitalization is a challenge and takes time. The implantation of a welcoming team to ensure guests have a great experience can be the start of a trend. Suppose Cub Creek truly desires to be revitalized and seeks the opportunity to flatten the curve of decline. A strategic plan to develop a vision and implement a working mission will be essential in that case. Being able to welcome guests and identify the needs of those guests is a crucial start. They can excel because of a leader's compelling desire to lead and move forward with a vision.

Any church moving into a revitalization process will have many questions and deal with many challenges along the difficult way. The process is a team effort and not a solo pastor effort. A solo effort will never work and will likely create burnout; a team should exist outside of the staff and lay leaders. The congregation will have a different view from the leaders and staff members. All church people have some influence; the team should exist of men and women of young and old voices. One standard accolade among all team members should be the ability to bring a positive role. The team should be well equipped and coached in the revitalization dynamic.

The goal is to build God’s kingdom as part of the revitalization process; church guests and the community is a significant connection to the process of revitalization. First and foremost, any church's essential component going through the revitalization process should know why the
church exists. A team that will grasp the biblical foundation of building God’s kingdom and implement those plans into the church infrastructure will see strides in reaching the community's loss.

A church leadership identifying a church for revitalization is looking for the components of why the church is unhealthy. Being stuck or in years of decline is a more straightforward way to identify the need for revitalization. While the identification process is the first approach, the developmental process is quality over speed. The identification comes with a sense of urgency, but the crucial component will be the strategic methodology to create the church’s appropriate repairs. A leadership team that is on board with a revitalization process is often a challenge. The leadership of the church is in leadership typically because of the years of service and membership. Often, leaders have family ties to the church, which creates a more significant challenge for any changes.

A revitalization team and a welcoming team are vital components, but structure will only develop and solidify by a well-trained group. The teams should have the ability to identify ways of moving the church from an inward focus to an outward focus; this move takes an approach in discipleship and evangelism. A revitalization process may take the church backward before progress is seen; this includes changing or eliminating programs within the church.

Data Analysis

This data will reveal how guests perceive their visit to Cub Creek Church. The survey is created to expose strengths and weaknesses for guests visiting. A comparison to similar churches will provide a standard for Cub Creek. Being able to gauge all guests’ levels creates the church’s ability to adjust and address concerns that the survey reveals. This researcher recruited a range of
participants from within the community who were willing to visit the church on campus during their time over the summer of 2020. The range of participants included single young adults to families to senior adults. The importance of the range of participants is to broaden the responses to the survey. A young adult will have a different perspective and seek different ideas when visiting a church. After participants were selected and necessary paperwork completed, the online survey was completed anonymously after a visit. All participants were provided a range of dates to attend, and the survey was sent by email after the range of dates had passed. The data collection will be broken down into all the answers per question to gauge how all participants answered the question.

Challenges

A few challenges presented in this research and project were around COVID-19 restrictions and difficulty in detailed answers. The pandemic created restrictions among people's gatherings and how gatherings happen. During the pandemic, Cub Creek was restricted on capacity and limited gatherings, such as no Sunday School or small group settings. Also, no ministry opportunities were provided to children during this time.

Another challenge within the context of the survey is detailed answers. While the survey is provided immediately after the visit, participants may not fulfill the survey's full details.

A third challenge will be the leadership team's susceptibility at Cub Creek to implement a strategic plan to improve their guest’s retention. After the data is analyzed, the researcher will develop a suggested strategic plan for Cub Creek to improve their welcoming team.
Conclusion

The plan for this research stems from a lack of guests coming to Cub Creek. Guest relations are essential to the formality and growth of the local and global church. The Great Commission calls the body of believers to fulfill what Christ has commanded.

There are many reasons that guests chose not to return for a second visit. Those reasons include:

• A stand and greet time during worship

For many first-time guests, this is an awkward time. Some guests identify this as a ritual time for current members to greet and play catch up, leaving newcomers with a sense of vulnerability just standing around. An alternative and more welcoming approach may be members of a welcoming team greeting new guests and sitting with any guest arriving who may be alone.

• Unfriendliness

Most church members feel they are approachable and friendly; the first-time guests often have a different opinion. As first-time guests, they are in uncharted territory. A first-time guest may experience a range of awkward moments, such as cliques during a welcoming moment or members who claim designated seats. A welcoming team that can interject excitement to first-time guests will create a more welcoming environment and ease a first-timer's anxiety.

• Unsafe

A safe church includes sanitary and safety with childcare areas. Many guests will explore the bathrooms and childcare areas; they are likely to receive a stiff judgment. A clean bathroom or old, smelly trash is a sure way to turn away guests. Any visiting families are going to request
information regarding children. Some churches stick to the old philosophy, “it will never happen here.” Today, protection is more prevalent than ever.

- **No information**

    When people show up at any place for the first time, they often seek to find information. No matter the size of the campus, all churches likely offer a range of ministries. Guests arriving on campus are curious about what options are available. Instead, a young adult is looking for college or singles ministry, a family seeking information about children or small group ministry, or a senior adult seeking to get involved. A visible and central location for guests coming on to campus is vital for success.

    A well-marked and inviting welcome center with a trained welcome team member to assist any first-time guests and provide updated material regarding ministries will help any first-time guests seek information about the church. A church willing to communicate to the community's people is a church that is willing and capable of reaching the community.

- **Poor social media**

    Social media and church websites are some of the most critical ingredients to receiving guests from the communities. Most guests are likely to have arrived on campus having already listened to sermons, watched an online service, read the staff’s biography, and read the church's beliefs. A social media platform and church website allow guests to be “in the know” before they arrive on campus. A website should be considered the front door of the church. An updated website with relevant and essential information will guide anyone visiting the site. Being able to clarify doctrine is essential to many guests. Other families are going to seek out information in the children and student ministry departments. At the very least, an address to the campus and worship times is necessary for the website.
• Bad signage

Another frustration for guests is simply not knowing where to go. Any member or guest who has been on campus for a few weeks will know where to go and how to get there, but first-time guests are neglected and often forgotten about it. There is a wide range of signage, from the roadside to inside the worship auditorium. A church campus needs to be marked with signs pointing in directions offering guidance to children’s ministry, worship center, bathrooms, and welcome center.

• Insider focus

Announcements and language around the church should be guests-friendly. Guests are not going to recognize the inside language spoken among members and staff. A foreign and acronym-filled language creates a challenge for guests to comprehend and understand, leaving them confused and feeling outsiders. It is common among most churches that members have their own designated pew they have personally declared theirs; any first-time guests will find an open spot and sit down, not knowing. The “you are sitting in my pew” statement is unbelievable and creates a change of heart for first-time guests.

• Boring service

A boring service can leave even a member with a bad taste. The worship service should be thoroughly planned out with all participating parties on board. A stagnant worship service with open dead spots creates awkward and lethargic moments. A worship service is a moving experience for guests and members. An authentic worship leader with the ability to guide the flow of service is essential in having the attention of those present and maintaining the attention.
Any guests visiting may observe the flow of the service and may not feel a movement should a sense of “going through the motions” occur.
Chapter 4

Results

Chapter 4 provides an evaluation of the church survey results. This chapter will begin with the purpose of the survey and details of the criteria to participate. The results will reflect participants' direct results as they concluded the survey after visiting the local church showing key human research findings.

Survey Purpose

The survey's purpose was to collect qualitative research to assess a church's welcoming ideology to the local community. The method of research provided an anonymous online survey to voluntary participants. The survey was created to provide research on how a guest may perceive a first-time visit. A total of 12 questions were asked, with a total of 11 participants. The survey was made available to any willing volunteer who met the age 18 and older criteria. The 11 participants were of different ages to provide a sufficient result formality for guests who may visit.

The survey posed questions about church hospitality and directions for the first-time guest to feel welcomed and comfortable in the presenting setting. The first question of the survey allowed the participants to detail social media findings. All participants agreed that social media information was available while the provided information was vague. The next question asked about acquiring directions to the church. Being in the community, several participants knew the church's location while other participants confirmed using GPS or asking for help. A few participants if signage to the church from the road was very poor or limited. On the next
question, most participants were drawn to the campus's neat appearance; however, only a few mentioned guest parking availability.

When asked about safety features, participants noticed the aisles being clear and a security team in place. Other participants confirmed handicap options and exit signs along with the availability of fire extinguishers. Out of the 11 participants, four did not notice safety features. Other participants described cameras and noticed the doors being locked once the service started. The next question discussed being greeted and information made available to the guest. Three participants indicated not being greeted. Other participants indicated being greeted by two greeters as they walked in and handed a bulletin with no other information provided about the church. One greeter confirmed no help was provided during the Sunday School hour, just the traditional worship time. When asked about signage and directions, only 2 participants noticed any signage leading in the direction of any kind. A participant-located bathroom is visible in the vestibule, but no assistance leads to the nursery and other ministries.

Most participants found the facilities clean and inviting; a few participants found that the church was not inviting. Many of the participants pointed out the church members' friendliness but was unhappy with the service flow. Other participants stated the service was excellent, and the pastor asked about guest connections. No participant mentioned receiving a gift during their visit; participants mentioned a visitor card and being welcomed back by members and the pastor. Of the 11 participants, only 8 mentioned feeling welcoming and satisfied to return for a second visit.
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Were you able to access Cub Creek Church on social media? What information was available to you? (staff, beliefs, ministries, directions, etc.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Yes. However, the web page doesn't have much information on the church itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>The church website was very primitive and offered very little information about staff, various ministry opportunities, and no directions to the facilities other than a physical address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Yes. Only listen to sermons and Sunday School on Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Yes. Ministries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Yes, I can access it on social media. I see directions and a phone number and that is about it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Yes, their website with all the information such as location, photo of all buildings, GPS coordinates, ministries, pastor info, and mission statement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Yes. Staff, Church Covenant, Videos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Yes, Facebook, service times and attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Yes, various ministries, staff, directions, beliefs, service types and times, contact information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Yes. Live stream service on FB and contact info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Hours, Address, Pictures, Service times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All participants identified a social media platform for Cub Creek; however, there is a diversity of which platform is best accessible. 3 Participants identified Facebook as a platform, three other participants identified the website, while all other participants identified resources on an unidentified resource. While participants identified social media platforms and a church website for Cub Creek, it is apparent the information provided is vague and possibly old.

Increasing stability in updated information creates more opportunities for welcoming guests to Cub Creek. It is likely a social media platform or website is the initial visit for any guest.

**Recommendation:** Utilizing a welcoming team to identify possible professional assistance in creating an excellent social media platform creates an increasing platform to reach the community and current members alike to publicize and keep all parties up to date with events and sermons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Question 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>How did you acquire the directions to Cub Creek Church? What type of signs helped in guiding you to Cub Creek Church?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>I knew where the church was at as a young person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>GPS, Sign on the highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Marquis in front of church grounds. GPS and physical address on the web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>There is a sign down on 16 as you turn on Hwy 18 and then there is a sign right at the church where you turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Asked for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Raised in the community. Did not need directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>One very old, very small, dilapidated, leaning and an almost hidden sign is placed approximately 1/4 miles from the church but offers absolutely no assistance in locating the church facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>GPS, Road Signs, and the Church sign in the Church Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>I'm from the area, so I did not need directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>We got the address from their website and entered it into Google maps on our phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All participants were able to find the church building's location by the ease of GPS, maps or asking for help. Some participants were already knowledgeable of the location. Participants were able to find the church facilities' location; however, participants revealed limited information regarding signage around the church facilities. Identifying location and promotion to the local community is essential in reaching the community and inviting those from the community.

Recommendation: An increase in appropriate signage coming from nearby roads of higher traffic will create more visiting guests. Also, more localized signage around the campus will create opportunities for those who visit and drive by to be current with what is going on.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Neat appearance, two available guest parking spots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Yes, designated visitor parking spaces, very well maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Yes. Striped off visitor parking. Handicapped parking. All in proximity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>There is no guest parking that I could see. The parking spaces appear to be adequately lined and there is space for handicap. The upkeep of the campus is nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>No guest parking. Parking lot was adequately marked. Campus is neat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>No guest parking was evident. Upon arriving you see three separate buildings two of which resemble normal church sanctuaries, but no direction of any kind was available to guide you. Upkeep of the campus was adequate. Lawns were mowed but no landscaping of any kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Campus looked great and parking was easily assessable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Parking was available and the campus is beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Adequate parking and the campus are well kept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Limited guest parking with adequate arrows. Campus was in good condition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven participants were able to identify guest parking spots, while others did not identify guest parking. Three participants alluded to adequate parking only; guest parking is essential for
being the guest priority. Participants were able to identify adequate parking and guest parking spots. While guest parking spots were identified, they were limited and not exactly accessible for anyone visiting.

Recommendation: Making guest parking known and visible as anyone visiting is coming into the parking will allow ample opportunity for a guest to come in with confidence and not be concerned with where they need to go.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Did you locate any safety features that made your visit more accommodating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Yes. Aisles were clear of any people congregating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Yes, Security team in place, all exits well marked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>All the facility was well signed and easily accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>There is a ramp out front which would accommodate those who have walkers and wheelchairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>We did not exit signs were illuminated and fire extinguishers were present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Handrails on steps and a ramp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>The sanctuary was well lighted and there were lighted exit signs at all exits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Out of 11 Participants, 7 identified some type of safety accommodation. The security team and visible exit signs were most noticeable, while handicap ramp and rails were also seen.

*Recommendation:* Safety parameters are essential, especially for families with younger children. Parents are curious as to who is taking care of their children and what precautions are being used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5</th>
<th>Were you greeted in the parking lot or as you entered the church building? What information was provided to you as a guest? If so, were they equipped to answer questions and/or guide you to where you needed to go?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Yes. Current guidelines were introduced in a friendly manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Yes. Church Bulletin, very informative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Greeters in vestibule of sanctuary. Very friendly, warm, and knowledgeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>There is no greeter except for the morning worship service. No one to direct you to Sunday School or rooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Yes, just welcomed with no information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>No greeters were to be seen in the parking lot. It was a &quot;choose as you please and hope for best&quot; situation. After deciding with no assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
which building to enter, we were greeted by two kind individuals who welcomed us, but they did not inquire any information of us nor did they offer any direction of where we should go once inside the building.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Greeted at the front door, and provided with a church bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Greeted at the main entrance with verbal instructions. No literature was provided.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Participants identified greeters in some capacity. All participants identifying a greeter identified the greeters being inside the vestibule. Participants identified the greeting process of Cub Creek by walking into the vestibule. A lack thereof was any relevant information for any guests visiting outside of a bulletin with minimal information regarding the service and church.

*Recommendation:* A guest connections center with trained volunteers will create a more inviting experience for anyone visiting Cub Creek. Most guests have likely researched the church already, but additional information at a connections center would be a vital next step. A guest connections center creates an opportunity for guests to connect with small groups and ministries by identifying what may be most appropriate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 6</th>
<th>Did you notice directional signage leading you to the worship center and other buildings on campus? Were you able to locate the bathrooms, nursery, children’s ministry?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Yes, but due to pandemic, areas were off limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>There was no directional signage of any kind. We located the restrooms on our own and were not informed of any other services provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>There are no directional signs leading to specific areas of the church. The bathrooms are visible upon entering the church but there are no signs that lead you downstairs to the nursery, children ministry or bathrooms downstairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>No signage visible but greeters were more than willing to accommodate every need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>There were none. Facilities were only located by asking for assistance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 out of 11 participants were able to identify any signage on campus. Signage is a crucial component for any guests visiting a church for the first time or continuing visits. Identifying resources on campus is essential for all persons on campus, from visits to congregants to leadership. A Church leadership team can strive with appropriate signage by identifying ease of direction when pointing guests to different campus components.

**Recommendation:** Any guests walking into a visit will be looking for connections and signage of where to go. Creating an environment that can be self-sufficient and an environment that is inviting is key in making guests feel comfortable and confident in visiting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 7</th>
<th>What did you find inviting about the facility? Was the facility clean and sanitary?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Yes, clean, and sanitary. Directions to the sanctuary were clear and precise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>The facility was very clean, bathrooms were sanitized and cleaned, facility appeared to be not old which helped its appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Nothing inviting but campus was clean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Nothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>It is a beautiful facility. The building is very clean and up to date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Warm, caring and very respectful of everyone's needs. Bulletins handed out that were informative of worship times and schedule of events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Very friendly, greeters in place, facility very clean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Outside was very well maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>The church was clean and sanitary. The people were very inviting. The updated sanctuary was inviting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Very attractive, clean, sanitary, and comfortable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All participants found the church facilities clean; however, 3 of the participants found nothing inviting about the facility. Eight of the participants pointed out the cleanliness of the church building.

*Recommendation:* A clean campus is essential but being inviting is more relevant to the guest. A welcoming team that identifies what it looks like to be a guest is a step ahead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 8</th>
<th>Was there directional signage inside the worship center leading you to other parts of the building?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Yes. However, since areas were closed due to the pandemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>There was no direction signage inside or outside any of the buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only 3 out of the 11 participants identified any directional signage during their visit to Cub Creek.

*Recommendation:* Creating a more welcoming environment by showing maps of the campus and rooms is critical with signage.

| Participant 8 | No |
| Participant 9 | Yes |
| Participant 10 | No |
| Participant 11 | No |

**Question 9**

*How would you describe the flow of the worship service? Were guests welcomed by other members? Did the pastor ask about guest’s connections?*

| Participant 1 | Guests were welcomed, but not called out. |
| Participant 2 | The pastor did not introduce himself either before the service began or during it. Visitors were welcomed by a few members during a time of shaking hands which I felt was very unsanitary and disrupted any flow that there possibly could have been to the service. |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Not good. Yes, but not exceptional. No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>No guest connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Yes, the pastor welcomes guests and asks them to fill out a visitor card. Guest are greeted and welcomed by members of the congregation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Very warm caring individuals. Pastor welcomed everyone and during initial announcements point our visitor card and asked those be completed and placed in the offering plates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Very nice service, very welcoming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>I was very happy with the way the service flowed. The best part of the church is how welcoming most members are to guests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>No Signage. Member contact was minimal, and the pastor did ask about our connection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 of the 11 Participants identified a connection the church body and leadership had with any guests visiting Cub Creek.

*Recommendation:* Guest connections provide a step up for anyone visiting. Any guest will be curious about the church’s foundation; providing the material is essential to guests.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Question 10</strong></th>
<th><strong>What are the safety parameters for the church members/guests visiting?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Aisles were marked to ensure social distancing along with directional signs to flow through the sanctuary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Have no idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Doors are locked during worship service. There are cameras that cover the parking lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>All rooms have locks. Video cameras outside and inside vestibule. Doors were locked during service. Security team available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Security Team well-lit and marked areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>The doors are locked once the service begins. They have a designated safety team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>They were not mentioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Safety Parameters](chart.png)
Participants identified safety parameters such as locked doors, video cameras and security teams.

*Recommendation:* More safety parameters may be sufficient to check in/check out nursery systems, children, and student ministries. Other parameters may include parking teams and connection cards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Did Cub Creek Church provide guests with follow-up information and/or provided a gift?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Guests were given the opportunity to complete a visitor card and place it in the offering plates. No gifts were offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Only if requested, no gift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Visitors encouraged to fill out cards and personnel would be in touch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Visitor cards and follow up call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Yes, once I visited, I was contacted by a member and pastor welcoming me back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>We filled out a guest card but, were not provided a gift.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 of the 11 participants identified some follow-up; however, there is a straightforward inconsistent follow-up method for Cub Creek.

*Recommendation:* In the Lifeway Research Project, being consistent with follow-up is crucial in guest retention. Having a steady flow of guests is essential but keeping a guest happy and returning is more complicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 12</th>
<th>Were you satisfied with your experience as a guest? What measures would you take to return to Cub Creek? What, if anything, would you add to your experience?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>A phone call to follow up with the visit from the preacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>The music was all prerecorded as it appeared the church was without any live musicians at the time of our visit. Using prerecorded music is difficult at best to achieve the level of personal worship that live musicians can impart. We were not overly pleased with our first visit experience and do not plan to return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>No. More inclusive atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>The church does need some work with welcoming visitors and guiding new visitors to certain locations in the church or on the...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
church grounds. It would be nice to have a packet to hand out to visitors and welcome them and invite them to come again. I think the church members are friendly and welcoming.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 6</th>
<th>Will return for future visit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>No, the information needs to be updated on the website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>I felt welcome however, we didn’t feel that anyone took a true personal interest in our visit!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 out of 11 guests to Cub Creek stated they were not interested in returning for a second visit.

**Recommendation:** The recommendations to retain guests at Cub Creek is broad. A wide range of reasons was provided as to why a guest would or would not return, providing places requiring attention. Being able to implement a welcome team with trained volunteers will allow the needs to be addressed appropriately.
In 2017, Lifeway Research surveyed 1000 participants. A range of protestant pastors was included as part of the survey and the respective church they were serving. The size of the church ranged from 0-49 congregant members to more than 250 congregant members. The above chart compares Cub Creek to a similar church and the overall lifeway research results.
How churches welcome guests

Among Protestant pastors

- Have an opportunity to meet the pastor after the service: 96%
- Have greeters at the entrances: 95%
- Have cards guests are asked to complete: 83%
- Have a central location where guests can learn about the church: 78%
- Set aside time during the service for regular attenders to welcome guests: 69%
- Periodically host an information session for new people to learn more about the church: 65%
- Have books in the pews for all attenders to indicate they were present that collects visitor information: 44%
- Have gifts for guests: 42%
- Have greeters or attendants in the parking lot: 24%
- Ask guests to stand in the worship service: 17%
- Other: 10%

Notes: None of these <1%. Respondents could select all that applied.

Figure 1

4 in 10 churches give guests gifts

Among Protestant Pastors

- Have books in the pews for all attenders to indicate they were present that collects visitor information: 44%
- Have gifts for guests: 42%
- Have greeters or attendants in the parking lot: 24%
- Ask guests to stand in the worship service: 17%
- Other (specify): 10%
- None of these: <1%

Figure 2
Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research plan proposed measurable and obtainable improvements for Cub Creek Church. The opportunity presents itself without an imminent threat to the growth and stability of membership. However, if a continued method of welcoming guests proceeds, a potential decline in membership is likely due to no visitation. A result of decline within a church will also lead to unhealthy ministry to the community. Chapter 5 summarizes all components of the research project. Every revitalization that takes place should exhibit several components to achieve a higher chance of success. Those components should strive from vision, focus, and desire.

A conceptual framework provided a review of literature that correlates church revitalization and welcoming guests. Essential topics such as hospitality, leadership, and church growth will stem as a foundation for welcoming guests.

Hospitality is seen at some level in almost all churches. In comparison, Cub Creek is relatively low compared to similar churches conducted by lifeway research. However, Cub Creek has some components to making guests feel welcomed, such as designated parking and social media platforms for research before any visit. A lack of hospitality beyond the church campus is essential but seemingly non-existent for Cub Creek. An increase in hospitality will create a more outreach-oriented approach and alleviate some stress for any guests visiting for the first time.

This research project provided a stated problem of a small rural church with a declining congregation of aged members who seek to serve the community minimally. A purpose was developed to identify a revitalization plan. Last, a study was completed that reflected the guests' welcoming who visit the church from within the community.
The study provided the research project results from Cub Creek. In addition to the project results at Cub Creek, information was provided from a lifeway research project used as a comparison effort. The overall challenge with this project will be changing. Change is often met with resistance, more often in older traditional churches, but maintaining influence is essential in an ever-changing society.

The following steps are encouraged for Cub Creek to implement a more strategic plan to reach the community:

* First, Cub Creek adherence to the roots of the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20 says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Being able to fulfill the church's Commission provides a firmer foundation of building believers to reach the community and a drive to be more inviting to those who visit.

* Second, a developmental plan by leaders implemented for trained volunteers to better fulfill the purpose of welcoming guests will present a more efficient return rate.

The results of the survey concluded that:

* Overall, there was not much of an issue trying to find the campus, but directions were somewhat challenging to find in the community. However, the participants identified the campus and sanctuary's cleanliness; however, they struggled to find their way to other parts on campus such as nursery or classrooms. Safety features and being handicap accessible were identified by several participants and adequate parking and available parking for anyone visiting.
* A lack of welcoming features was acknowledged by many participants identifying no help as they entered the sanctuary, no follow-up as a guest, nor opportunities for guests upon arrivals.

* A lethargic service identified as no set order of service. However, a common occurrence of friendly congregants set a positive tone.

**Summary of the Results**

This information provides ample opportunity for Cub Creek to begin a welcoming plan to be more efficient for guests visiting the church. An opportunity has been raised to train a team and develop a strategy to ensure any guest visiting Cub Creek will feel welcomed and increase those guests’ increased return.

These insights can be profitable for Cub Creek and should include:

* Church leadership identifying a team that possesses the spiritual gifts of reaching and loving others, not volunteers who step in to fill a void.

* The Church should seek commitment in addressing the website to provide more up-to-date information regarding the church and functions such as staff information, church directions, and ministry opportunities that would be revealing for any guest.

* The Church will seek updated signage exterior and interior that allows community prospects to access the campus and find comfort in their visit easily.

* Church leadership will promote a more fluent structure for welcoming guests by creating an environment on campus that is inviting to all. This environment shall include information regarding the current ministries of the church and their designated contact with activities.
* Church leadership will seek service changes to create a more functional and easy flow.

* Church leadership shall implement the idea of reaching the community and identify what needs are within the community to serve better. If Cub Creek exists to evangelize and disciple the local community, they must have a better understanding culturally and exegetically of the area.

**Implementation Design**

Suggested implantation for Cub Creek to develop a more efficient guests service with being developing the following strategic plan:

This plan is encouraged to be followed before developing the budget year to maximize a plan for revitalization and addressing the need to become a more welcoming church.

Pastor Meeting – An initial planning meeting with the pastor to discuss vision and revitalization would occur. The research results are discussed in the meeting and a step-by-step process of what a guest experiences while visiting Cub Creek. After having a complete understanding of the experience, a pastor onboard is critical before transitioning to the leadership team.

Leadership Training – While the pastor is on board, the next step in the plan will discuss leadership. A review of the survey results and discussion of the survey walk-through will provide a basis for all leadership. Leadership training will be broken down into six sessions. A suggested plan is to break down the survey into four sessions after an initial review. Before the sessions, the leadership team will identify a range of volunteers to include as a welcome team and a prep team in developing a welcoming strategy. The volunteers should be identified with diversity in mind resulting in age, culture and spiritual gifts. The welcome team volunteers are an asset to the
promotion of welcoming guests. These volunteers should be ambitious and have traits of outgoing and positive communication. A range of age and culture volunteers will create the ability to reach all local people's demographics.

- The pre-visit session will address the issues stemming from the survey as provided.
- The visit session will be broken into two sessions because of the detailed criteria.
- The post-visit session will address the issues of follow-up founded by the survey results.
- A final session will bring all the issues together and implement a strategy to create a plan.

The strategy implemented – A well-trained welcome team to provide an excellent guest’s service will be vital in implementing the strategy. The retention of guests will be a result of how well-trained the team functions. These functions are essential and involve a range of planning.

The initial planning will incorporate detailed planning on how to best implement welcoming guests through the social media platform and website. Since Facebook is a priority, the website and Facebook should link information to be the best communication fit. A social media and website manager is essential in seeing that the platform is regularly updated with accurate information; it may be recommended to seek professional help.

Addressing the campus's outside signage to ensure that guests can quickly locate the campus will be a crucial component. This signage will include eliminating any old and dilapidated signage and creating well-seen signage guiding any guest to the campus. Once on campus, guests should have visible instructions and adequate parking in locating where they need to go.

An on-campus visit will need the most attention from the welcome team. Any guests who have made it to this stage have already decided factors to be there; a welcome team should
present wow moments to all guests on campus. The wow moments include anything and
everything the campus has to offer. A guest is coming on to campus to find a well-kept campus
and visible signage and direction. An on-campus guest service with ample information about
chuch ministries, small groups and calendars with well-equip volunteers should be a
centerpiece. A senior citizen will be looking for accommodations, while a family will be looking
at areas for children to roam. Other areas to address will be security and parking. A guest coming
into the facilities will be looking for more directions and information. A single adult will be
looking for potential ministries, and young families will be looking for the nursery and the safety
around the nursery. The nursery and children’s ministry's safety parameters will include
volunteer background checks and check-in features for kids on campus, including information
tabs about the child. The service will draw attention by having a prepared service eliminating any
stagnant or awkward moments. A team of volunteers willing to assist with seating may help ease
entrance pressure while music playing before service allows the tension to ease. A guest will
have the option to complete a connect card while on campus and possibly receive a gift on their
way.

Any guests with intentions of identifying a church home will complete a connect card,
and follow-up should be implemented. A volunteer team with the leadership team will identify a
methodology in following up with guests.

**Further Research**

Further research to cross-correlate the implementation of church planting and church
revitalization may also relate to small churches. Most churches are not reaching new people and
many Americans are trending away from congregational involvement.\(^{113}\)

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\(^{113}\) Rick Richardson. *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and
A church can welcome guests to retain guests can learn from church planting concepts as part of church revitalization. Research on the church in America shows a steady decline along with large numbers leaving the church. The church has lost its influence in the communities and becoming more pessimistic among the social realms. Church attendance continues a downward trend among Americans as other priorities replace the importance of regular attendance. The normality of going to church is no longer of importance to many believers; therefore, the reflection of being inviting for communities and unchurched is continually decreasing.

Perhaps, the increasing attention drawn to church replanting may provide a more solid foundation in the understanding and importance of church functionality to fulfill the great commission. In Matthew 28, Christians are instructed to reach the nations and expand the kingdom of God. Churches are closing daily, having missed the mark of spreading the gospel effectively within the respective communities.

In *Higher Expectations* by Thom Rainer, 80 percent of visitors attend after being invited by a friend or family member. The reality of these results is likely a reflection of an exceptional service but provides the lackluster attempt of the church reaching and fulfilling the Great Commission. The implication of guest retention is seen over the church's longevity, having a personal preference drive. Churches are not reaching new people; congregations find comfort by inviting friends or family members that may boost attendance for a special event and provide a spark for the congregation as a matter of awe. The spark of awe will dwindle as a steady flow will continue. Over time, the dense demographics of the congregation will age, and complications will begin.

The Bible is vague on how to do church. Although the charge to fulfill the Great Commission is simple, sustaining focus in reaching the community is an ongoing challenge with
inconsistent efforts and misperceptions. The growing population and changing demographics of communities present more challenges; however, the younger generations exhibited an apparent inability to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Despite the research project, the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 directly impacted the global church and the community. While welcoming guests continues to be a vital component of the global church today, further research on how change continues to impact local communities will be vital to seeing growth in the church. Intentional and lasting change is a component that will need to strive if the church continues to exist in today’s ever-changing society. Online church development is ever-changing and becoming more demanding since the impact of COVID-19. The year 2020 drastically changed the landscape of church and revitalization. Many of the church congregations have had to be creative in gatherings. An already declining church can suffer a detrimental blow to the future.

As the online church component unveils itself and Cub Creek becomes more accommodating to members through technology, the continued research is a challenge. The online church has created a rapid change in ministry and attracting people differently. The new option creates a new way of fulfilling the Great Commission and reaching the community. Christians’ trend will grow in watching the local church rather than being engaged with the local church. The online church creates an opportunity to become more outward.

The need for revitalization is evident in the comparison of research to the literature review. First impressions are primary in welcoming guests. All ages of guests should be taking into consideration. More dynamics focused on the family is trending for first impressions and the dire need for a broader range of accommodations is needed. The past generation has shown aging signs of decline in Christianity and those who profess as Christians have become less.
Unfortunately, no matter how significant the need is for revitalization, most members don’t want or will refuse to help with the revitalization process despite the need for revitalization. A revitalization process will likely see a change in membership and the church will continue to see a decline in attendance before an increase. Many members will want instant change, instant change in revitalization may not necessarily be healthy. A healthy change should not be seen with members leaving and the first few years will be filled with conflict and challenge.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, substantial evidence through research reveals the decline of the church in modern society. The church has become a second to none priority for the average believer, therefore slacking to reach the local community and fulfill the Great Commission. The complexity to impact communities can present difficulty simply due to demographics; moreover, the issue often lies within the local church's lackluster attempt to reach out. Jesus calls his people to build His Church.\(^{114}\)

In building His Church,\(^ {115}\) the revitalization process is a direction for the church to be sustained and healthy. This process includes Exalting Christ, proclaiming the gospel, scripture affirmation and spreading God’s love to the community's people. The process of Church revitalization will best benefit from “slow and steady will win the race.” A well-deserving journey despite many bumps and turns will decide lasting change. Being adaptable to the foundation of Christ sets the purpose in seeing revitalization and glorifying God alone. A teachable congregation creates an opportunity to reach the lost in the community. A teachable

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\(^{114}\) Matthew 16-18 ESV.

\(^{115}\) 1 Corinthians 3:6 ESV.
congregation will be willing and sharing the good news that will flourish when measured against the New Testament church pattern. A common characteristic among the church should be the connectedness among the loss of the community. Jesus Christ had an unwavering commitment to see all people of the world gather his church, not a selected people group. His radical way of winning the nations’ lost souls should promote the local church's courage to reach all people. Jesus died and rose again to save his church and build his church.

This research project supported the importance of guests and revealed the failing factors of retaining guests. Overall, Cub Creek has a sense of fear of any change that may occur. Because of severe decline and aging congregation, the strategic decisions are primarily focused on what is best for the current congregation. To accept the need for change, the church must see the change in the culture.

Over the years, the congregation became accustomed to their church style by creating a sense of control. While the control and predictability solidify a healthy and dynamic culture within, a barrier has now surrounded the church by creating the inward focus that will drive the congregation. Any idea of change brings forth the ultimate perception of fear to any congregation who has sacrificed and even idolized the church through years of ministry within the context of the inward focuses. Often, the fear is developed from their sense of entitlement and ties to the church. Those ties arrange from family to finances to leadership. Faithfulness to stewardship entails a desire to glorify; the sense of entrusting and admitting a decline while needing newness is often overwhelming.

Church revitalization is a defining moment for the congregation of any church. The daunting task will weigh heavy challenges among the leaders, staff, and members. The dynamics of revitalization and ensuring that guests have a successful visit should be on the minds of every
member, leader, and staff member. The connection that any church has to its community should be the most critical concept to all parties. If done effectively through structured discipleship and evangelism, the results will be revealed.
Bibliography


https://www.turnaroundpastor.com/guest-assimilation-for-church/


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www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning/.

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Appendix A

Survey

Pre-visit

• Were you able to access Cub Creek Church on social media? What information was available to you? (staff, beliefs, ministries, directions, etc.)

• How did you acquire the directions to Cub Creek Church? What type of signs helped in guiding you to Cub Creek Church?

• When you arrived, is guest parking available to you? How is the parking lot adequately lined to direct you? How would you describe the upkeep of the campus?

• Did you locate any safety features that made your visit more accommodating?

Visit

• Where you greeted in the parking lot or as you entered the church building? What information was provided to you as a guest? If so, were they equipped to answer questions and/or guide you to where you needed to go?

• Is there directional signage leading you to the worship center and other buildings on campus? Did you locate the bathrooms, nursery, children’s ministry?

• How was the facility inviting to you? Is the facility clean and inviting?

• Is there directional signage inside the worship center leading you to other parts of the building?

• How do you describe the flow of the worship service? Were guests welcomed by other members? Did the pastor ask about guest’s connections?

• What are the safety parameters for the church members/guests visiting?

Post-visit

• Did Cub Creek Church provide guests with follow-up information and/or provided a gift?

• Were you satisfied with your experience as a guest? What measures would you take to return to Cub Creek? What, if anything, would you add to your experience?
Appendix B

Form

[Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to help Cub Creek Church understand the importance of welcoming guests. This information includes church website, visibility and signage and safety. This information will also include how guests perceive a first time visit and identifying adequate procedures in welcoming guests and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older. A participant may invest up to 2 hours to complete the procedures listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required. The survey will be available to you after your visit. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to participate.

Sincerely,

Adam Walker
Researcher
336-469-3207/amwalker3@liberty.edu
Appendix C

Consent

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Church Guests Matter: A Strategic Program to Welcome Guests

Adam Walker
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to participate in a research study on church guests. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Adam Walker, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry/School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Before you agree, the investigator must tell you about (i) the purposes, procedures, and duration of the research; (ii) any procedures which are experimental; (iii) any reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, and benefits of the research; (iv) any potentially beneficial alternative procedures or treatments; and (v) how confidentiality will be maintained.

PURPOSE

• The purpose of this study is to help Cub Creek Church understand the importance of welcoming guests. This information includes church website, visibility and signage and safety. This information will also include how guests perceive a first time visit and identifying adequate procedures in welcoming guests.

PROCEDURES: If you agree to partake in this survey, I will ask you to do the following:

• Complete a survey will several questions about a visit to Cub Creek Church. The survey will be available online.

A participant may invest up to 2 hours to complete the procedures listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

RISKS: The risks involved with this study are minimal and confined to those of your everyday life.

BENEFITS: Participants should not anticipate a direct benefit from this study.
CONFIDENTIALITY: The records of this anonymous study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

You may contact Adam Walker at amwalker3@liberty.edu any time you have questions about the research. The researcher’s faculty mentor is Dr. Todd Hartley, and you may contact him at cthartley@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop.

Signing this document means that the research study, including the above information, has been described to you orally, and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant  Date

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Witness  Date
Appendix D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 16, 2020

Adam Walker
Clifford Hartley

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY19-20-276 Church Guests Matter: A Strategic Program to Welcome Guests

Dear Adam Walker, Clifford Hartley:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study does not classify as human subjects research because:

Your project involves quality improvement activities, which are not considered “research” according to 45 CFR 46.102(d).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office