

**THE KEN JOHNSON GROUP, LLC**

Creative church consulting for the 21st

*The Phantom Pew Sitter #2*

#2 includes the stories of phantom visits from July 31, 2005 to August 13, 2006. The pew sitter tells about the good and the bad of each of those visits. If you would like to know the names of the churches visited please contact us.

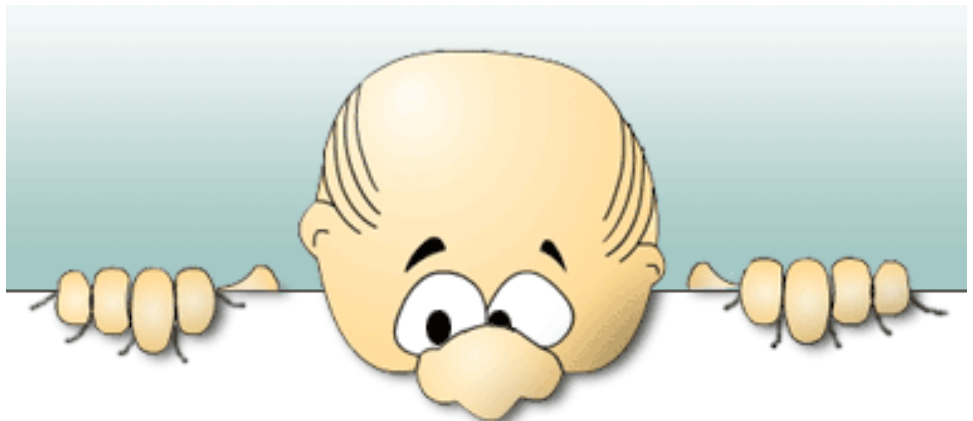
If you would like to view the first group of visits go to [www.thekenjohnsongroup.com](http://www.thekenjohnsongroup.com) and you will find them in the Articles section.

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## *The Phantom Pew Sitter #2*

### The Ken Johnson Group

This is the second group of visits from July of 2005 to August of 2006 and culminates in the 100<sup>th</sup> church visited. I actually made my first visit in group #2 on February 23, 2003 and made visit #100 on August 13, 2006.

I continue to have feelings of excitement, depression, fun, learning, teaching, and many others that happen when I visit churches with different pastors, different worship leaders and different styles of worship. Everything I have seen is valid worship but maybe not valid in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Maybe they were valid in the 1940's, 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's but not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I trust that these first 100 have been enlightening to everyone who has read them and that they have helped you to evaluate your worship and do a better job.

I realize that there are people who think people should change to the style of worship that they use realizing that everything else in the culture is changing but church should stay the same. I'm sorry that that doesn't work, but it doesn't.

The first information about visits in *The Phantom Pew Sitter #2* begins on page 10 and the information from page 2 to 10 is what is included at the beginning of *The Phantom Pew Sitter #1* concerning what I saw and my recommendations to the churches. My recommendation is that we, the Christian Community—both liberal and conservative, need to find a way to work together to bring people to Christ or we will continue to alienate people to Christ.

### **Information from *The Phantom Pew Sitter #1***

Quite honestly, 2002 through July of 2005 has been a very interesting and exciting time in my life. Since leaving my former Director of Worship position in January of 2002 I have had the privilege of visiting more than eighty different churches, both denominational and non-denominational, from Catholic to the Vineyard and observing their worship offerings. It has been an eye opener, and has confirmed many of my concerns about the church. To be very candid in many of the churches I visited there wasn't much of anything happening in worship. They were mostly just going through the motions without much real ministry, and they were certainly not sending their people out to spread the "Good News."

The one thing I need to make clear is that I don't pull any punches—I tell it like I see it. If you want to find out more about my background and experience then go to the following web site and you will find out all of the details. [www.thekenjohnsongroup.com](http://www.thekenjohnsongroup.com)

Generally what I saw was a sanctuary of gray haired people, which there is nothing wrong with, and pastors who obviously want to continue traditional services that have no excitement or energy, that are going through the motions of worship. There is also nothing wrong with a traditional service if it is really meaningful. When they finished the service in most of the churches it was obvious that the people weren't going out to minister to the world, they were going out to continue their normal hum-drum day

to day activities which probably didn't include any ministry or, for that matter, their time probably won't even include any thought of what had just happened at church that day.

There were also those churches that were alive and vibrant with the energy of the Christian Faith meeting me as I entered the parking lot, and that same feeling permeated everything that happened from getting out of the door of my car, to entering the building, to entering the sanctuary and throughout the service. This enthusiasm even continued as I was leaving. People greeting me, and extending their hand in fellowship, wishing me a good week, and I knew that when they left they were ready to go out and "preach the gospel to the world."

In all instances the churches where I walked away with a feeling of excitement were either independent or Evangelical. The mainline churches, to a church, and I visited the major mainline churches in the Denver Metropolitan area, were basically filled with the "frozen chosen." I'm sure the people were very nice people, and that they were very giving people, but they certainly weren't the kind of people that were going to go out and minister to the world. And this is the only way that the word of God will be spread to the world. If the church members aren't challenged on Sunday morning, or whenever they worship, they aren't going to go out and minister to the people around them, and in most of the mainline churches the people weren't challenged.

Truth be known, the mainline churches probably averaged in age somewhere above fifty- five years of age and the independent and Evangelical churches probably averaged about forty years of age and younger.

Having been raised in a more Gospel oriented church and marrying into a mainline denomination I began, at an early age, to see, but not understand, the differences between the two distinct thoughts and styles of the Christian Faith. I realize that there are many varieties in the Evangelical churches and in the mainline churches but for purposes of this treatise we will discuss just the **traditional Evangelical churches and the traditional mainline churches.**

I will begin by setting out my own personal prejudices. Having been raised in the church of the Nazarene in the forties and fifties I was subject to the denominations rule oriented Christian Faith. You can't dance, you can't wear makeup, you can't go to movies, and many more "you cant's," of which not doing the "you cant's," certainly won't get you to Heaven. When I married I married "out of the faith," so to speak. My wife was born and raised in the Presbyterian church where every church service, even then, was dead silence, not even a little laughter, and she was not about to go to the Church of the Nazarene where they said "amen" and "praise the Lord" during the service, and honestly I was tired of the "you cant's," so we joined her church, a United Presbyterian Church, in 1960. An interesting sidelight to the quiet Presbyterian Church was my discussion with the pastor about the deadpan faces and quietness of the congregation. He told me that he would love to have some feedback about the sermon during the service, or even after the service for that matter, but it never seemed to happen. Incidentally, he was an excellent minister and preached the Word of God, and lived what he preached.

Since that time I have taught in the public schools and college and have had part-time and full-time church music positions in Missouri Synod Lutheran, United Presbyterian, Independent Congregational, UCC Congregational, United Methodist, I had the privilege of being in on the beginning of the Evangelical Presbyterian denomination,

Baptist General Conference, a non denominational church, an American Baptist church, and UPC/USA church. Whew, it seems like its time to take a breath. Over forty years of ministry in all, and every minute has been worth it. In many of those ministry's, besides running the music and arts programs, I had opportunities to preach, to manage the facilities, to hire and fire employees for the church at large and to chair the recruitment committee for the organization of the 1986 Denver Billy Graham Crusade choir, which included more than 8000 singers.

Over the years and in the variety of denominations in which I have been involved, I have found that generally there was not much difference in the denominations, except in the area of the essentials and the non-essentials. The biggest arguments came concerning communion and baptism or whether you can call a Christian a "born again" Christian. From my prospective if we as Christians could quit badmouthing each other and get on with spreading the "good news" about our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, we could win the world for Christ overnight.

Now you've heard my prejudices so let's get on to what I saw and heard in each of those churches. Generally speaking in the mainline churches the orders of worship had absolutely no flow to them. They reminded me of a high school musical directed by a drama person who had no idea how to tie together the music and the drama sections. You would have a certain section of the service and then you would stop and get ready to start the next part, and in this day of movies and smooth running TV programs the people are looking for more than that. They want to be taken from one portion of the service to another with a seamless flow. There needs to be highs and lows, exciting moments and silent moments, and each of those pieces needs to fit together smoothly. What I found was a hodge-podge of pieces put together randomly without any understanding as to why. The hymns that they sang were not necessarily chosen to fit into the context of the whole but were there, it seemed like, because they needed hymns.

The hymns themselves are a major problem in the mainline church. There are many hymns in the new mainline denomination hymnals that are literally unsingable and many times hymns are selected for their lyrics and not for their singability, which for the normal congregation member is not fun. The reason one does hymns in a service is to include the congregation physically and mentally not just to have a hymn, and when they can't sing the hymns they quit then you have defeated the purpose of the hymn. The hymns are also there to be a part of the worship flow and hopefully a continuation of the message. In the more evangelical churches, especially the ones with blended services the hymns coupled with the choruses completed the meaning of the service. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that this blending of the lyrical content with everything that happened in the service happened in every instance, but generally speaking it happened more often in the Evangelical churches than in the mainline churches.

#### **An interesting story**

One of the only times anyone really talked to me was at a Church where I wore clerical collar shirt and a lady talked to me because she thought I was a pastor. I quite wearing that shirt after that.

The following are some of the things that I saw in the churches I visited that I thought might be of help to all of the pastors and churches. One thing that I would suggest is that each of you who has anything to do with worship listen to a tape of the service at least once a month and see what feels comfortable and what feels uncomfortable to you and make changes as they are needed.

I trust that you will pass along my suggestions to the people on your staff and that you will have your entire staff become members of our Tips For the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Church.

**Notes from churches visited for your  
worship committee and pastor**

- Up and down, up and down, up and down – don't do this in the service. You need to have some periodic movement just to keep your parishioners awake but don't overdue it. Does the congregation have to stand every time they sing or speak?
- Offering plates with long handles that go to the middle of the pew? An interesting thing I saw in one of the churches I visited.
- Pastor please put some drama in your message. If you need to take drama lessons then do it. This one thing will change your entire presentation.
- I do think it is important to have at least one usher in every aisle when you are taking the offering.
- Passing the Peace. I think this works well. Make sure that your people know what it means to pass the peace.
- Symbolism in the church. What is the purpose? How much should there be?
- I realize that all Christians don't have to go out and preach the Gospel but they do need to be ready to witness when the need arises.
- The lyrics on the screen can't be too busy and they have to be readable. You need to have a large enough point size and the proper colors to make them visible. You also need a somewhat dark room or equipment that really has a strong throw.
- Do you have to sing every verse?
- Authentic people practicing an authentic faith – the people who go to church need to be this kind of people.
- Don't be a Christian freeloader.
- We need to be a 21st Century church with 1st century power.
- An interesting idea: at one church the Pastor offered a pew Bible to anyone who wanted one.
- Get your congregation involved in the worship. Have them repeat something you say even during the message, have them answer questions with a yes or no or answer a question by raising their hands, whatever you need to do to get them involved.
- Don't let your video camera people be distracting to the congregation (if you video your services).
- How can you say that you love God if you don't show it?
  - I. Take responsibility for yourself
    1. Everyone has a part in the work of the Lord. Use what you have been given.
    2. Don't compare yourself to others.

One thing that I would suggest is that each of you who has anything to do with worship listen to a tape of your service at least once a month and see what feels comfortable and what feels uncomfortable and make changes as they are needed.

3. Find your talent and use it.
4. Accept your limitations.

## II. Esteeming others

1. Don't seek to cut off other members. God brings us to places we cannot get to alone.
  2. We cannot go along as a passenger. When all members fulfill their ministry, the life of God's ministry flows. We have the Son. We have life. We hold fast to the head (God), not to individual members, or the leadership.
- One church with probably 400 to 500 in attendance had at least 30 people to serve communion, that's great, make sure you always have enough people to move this along.
  - Some churches included applause and in most of the churches it worked well. You just have to make sure that the applause is for what the Lord has just done in worship and not for some "star." You also need to communicate to your people that it is okay to not applaud if they don't want to.
  - Let your people know that it is alright for them to worship in the style that they would like to. If they want to raise their hands that's fine, if they want to applaud that's fine, if they want to say praise the Lord let them do it and tell your other members that they too are welcome to not do any of those things, but it is okay for the other people to do them.
  - Pastor thinks that a church has to be either one that gets excited about worship or is very passive – there are no other choices. It's either hand clapping music or Bach and Rutter, but there has to be some excitement and energy.
  - Please select hymns that are singable by the congregation – what did Martin Luther make the break from the Catholic for if we are not going to sing hymns that are singable?
  - Announcements need to be a part of worship not before the service. They are part of the worship of the community and need to be included in the worship portion of the service, not before the service begins when many people are still in the narthex and can't hear them. Please, please, please do your announcements during the service—I mean at least 10 to 15 minutes into the service so everyone will get to hear them. In marketing you have to tell or show a person something at least seven times before they will remember it and for some reason in our churches we think we can tell them once and they will remember it and do what you want. When will we ever learn?

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- Announcements: Please don't read them; do them from memory and in an exciting way bring them to life and you will have people listen.
- Hymns need to move along tempo wise – don't let them drag.
- The church is an equipping center.
- Have your staff listed in the bulletin with both a phone number and an email address so people can get in touch with them.
- Laughter and repetition in your message are very important.
- To the people on the platform—be sure to watch the person or people who are presenting things—don't be looking out at the congregation.
- Always make sure you have at least one usher in every aisle or the congregation thinks that they aren't good enough to have a full contingent. It makes it awkward. And being an usher is a place where you can use new Christians or even non-Christians.
- If your Praise Team Leader is not good at introducing things don't have them do it, find other people to present the music.
- Make sure that you either have a license or don't print the words in the bulletin or put the words of songs on the screen.
- Many of the churches put the page number of the scripture in their bulletin so the illiterate church members don't even have to find the scripture at church. One thing I found was, that generally speaking, only the Evangelical churches encouraged their members to bring their Bibles to church. When are we going to get back to encouraging our members to use their Bibles seven days a week?
- It is so important that you put the type of service that you are doing on your sign so people will know and it may attract more visitors. (Truth in advertising you know)
- One of the most important thing that you can do in the sanctuary is get the worship leaders as close to the congregation as possible. This includes the choir, the praise team, the pastor and all.

### **Notes for your choir, praise team, soloists and organist/keyboardist:**

#### **Choir**

- Don't ever let your choir hold music and sing without folders.
- Don't allow any of your singers to sing in the dark, and I don't mean the dark as far as their Christian faith is concerned, I mean without any light on them.
- Make sure that your choir member's faces are mirroring what the lyrics are about. They need to show excitement and energy at all times.
- I think it is wonderful to have your choir in the aisles when they sing but make sure that they aren't so far down front that the people in the back of the sanctuary can't hear them.
- If you do opening and closing responses make them no longer than 10 to 15 seconds and with enough vigor, verve and energy that your congregation is propelled into the service and out of the sanctuary with real life and excitement.

- Responses need to be short and sweet – 30 seconds or less like a commercial. They have to sell quickly.
- Get your choir out of the loft and down into the congregation especially during the Cantata.
- When you are doing a major work make sure that you don't allow dead spaces unless they are supposed to be there.
- Dear choir members: During the cantata please don't turn pages with the soloist. The organ music needs to be at least enjoyable.
- Be sure to watch the person or persons who are singing solos or presenting things—don't be looking out at the congregation.
- Don't have the choir move from the loft to sit in the congregation even if it does help fill up the sanctuary—it takes too much time and makes it look like you don't have enough people.
- Contemporary Services typically start late. Why does this always have to be true? What's wrong with the contemporary folks that won't allow them to start on time? Start your service on time.
- Make sure that the piano is positioned so when you lift the lid the sound will go toward the choir and not the congregation.

### Praise Team

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| <p>Your praise team members need to keep their eyes open and focused on the congregation. Closing your eyes is for a nightclub. Remember you are leading the people in worship not just yourself.</p> |
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- your eyes is for a nightclub. Remember you are leading the people in worship not just yourself.
- The praise team needs to be alive.
- Make sure that all singers on your praise team are standing – unless they are at a keyboard.
- Don't ask the congregation to sing if you are going to have the sound so loud that they can't hear themselves and if they don't know the songs and you don't teach them to them.
- When you do choruses don't take big breaks between songs – there needs to be a flow.
- Be sure to watch the person or persons who are singing solos or presenting things—don't be looking out at the congregation.
- Make sure that you either have a license or don't print the words in the bulletin or put the words of songs on the screen.
- Contemporary Services typically start late. Why does this always have to be true? What's wrong with the contemporary folks that won't allow them to start on time? Start your service on time.



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### **Soloists and small groups**

- Always have soloists where they are visible to all of the people in the congregation. Make sure that they make eye contact with the congregation.
- Soloists don't move until the final sound of the accompaniment ends.
- Make sure that you are in place to do special music – I visited a church where the soloist for the offering and the accompanist came down the center aisle to do special after the offering began and by the time they got started the offering was over half completed.

### **Organist/Keyboardist**

- It's important for the organist/pianist/praise band to keep the hymns moving or they will die.
- Make sure that you have some variety in what you use in the service. Don't always use the same stops, the same meter, the same keys or anything that will get monotonous the more you use it.

## **Notes from churches visited for your sound person and video people**

### **Sound**

**Think “sound reinforcement”  
not “sound blaster.”**

- Make sure that all instruments and parts are heard in the mix.
- Learn what the EQ knobs are for and how to use them. Make everyone sound as natural as possible.
- Don't play the accompaniment tape so loud that you can't hear the soloist or group.
- Lay back on the sound for the preacher so he/she can get louder and softer in their presentation.
- If you are going to use original video's within your service make sure that they are of excellent quality both sound wise and visually.
- If you have an instrumental bridge the you need to identify that on the slide so the congregation knows.
- Teach your people how to hold a mic so they look relaxed.
- Make sure that you change the words on the screen as soon as the last word on the screen is sung. Don't be late.
- Make sure that the sound balance is good – don't allow anyone to not be heard, especially the lead singers.

- Make your sound “sound reinforced” and not “sound blaster.”
- If you have a problem with static from your cordless mics (especially your lavs) it probably comes from one of three things.
  1. A loose or broken antenna wire
  2. A low or dead battery
  3. The placement of your receiver
  4. If you are having problems with your receiver it may be because it is too far from the microphones so move it closer.

### **Lyrics, etc. on a screen**

- See if back screening helps if it's too light in the sanctuary.
- Don't have too much activity on the screen behind your lyrics.
- Make sure that the lyrics are large enough to read and that the background and the color of the letters has enough contrast to read them.

The following are notes that I took from my visits to more than 80 churches in the Denver area, Grand Junction, Colorado Springs, Boulder and Ft. Worth, TX. As you will notice I haven't identified any of the churches for their protection. If you see a church that seems like it is yours then it probably is or you are either doing the right things or making the same mistakes.

### **The following are the criteria that I used to evaluate each church.**

#### **They are in chronological order:**

I tried to wear the opposite clothing that the church members would wear so I would stand out in the crowd.

- Was I greeted as I enter the parking lot or before?
- Was there someone to guide me into a parking place?
- Do they have enough parking?
- Are there any easy to find “visitor” parking spaces?
- Are there signs conveniently located to help me find where I am going?
- Am I greeted at the front door?
- Am I greeted when I enter the sanctuary?
- Is there someone to help me find a place to sit?
- Is the music worth being there for?
- Do they have a worship leader or praise team leading the music and are they any good?
- What kind of music do they do?
- Is the music exciting (full of life) and worshipful not slow and dead?
- When do they do announcements?
- Is the congregation friendly? Do they greet me anytime?
- Do they have enough ushers?
- Do they have everybody and his brother lead in worship because “We have to be politically correct?”
- Is there any laughter and joy in the service?
- What about the message?

- Is the presenter boring or exciting to listen to?
- Is the message worth listening too?
- Does the presenter give us time to think as well as times to laugh and respond?
- Does anyone come and greet me after church?
- Is there anyone at the door to greet me when I leave? This doesn't need to be the pastor it could be anyone.
- I also looked through the bulletin to see if there seemed to be any outreach ministry.

## *The Phantom Pew Sitter #2*

July 31, 2005 and August 7, 2005

This issue of *The Phantom Pew Sitter* takes us to a church that I have visited three times. The truth is that the first time I visited I sang in the choir. The first visit did find two or three people in the choir welcoming me and talking to me, but not a soul in the congregation said a word to me. That fact is even more telling when I tell you that I visited two more times sitting in the congregation and the only time anyone talked to me was at the greeting time.

I was greeted at the door and one person gave me a bulletin at the sanctuary door, but that was the extent of greeting extended to me. I truly felt welcome and wanted to come back again the next Sunday. NOT!!

I had a reason to go for all three of those Sundays and it had nothing to do with me and that is the only reason I went. I might go back again if the same reason arises again, but if it doesn't I will definitely not return.

Okay, it's obvious that they are not a very friendly church, but does the church have any have any other redeeming values? The current pastor is an interim and does a nice job, but he is not someone that I would want to hear every Sunday.

This church had a very difficult time with the last pastor. His leaving was not very much fun. Oh well—so much for “the church.”

The interim pastor's messages were very nice—not very challenging, but very nice. When you left the service you didn't feel threatened and you also didn't feel like you had done or heard anything that would help you on your way to heaven.

The second Sunday I went a young high school girl sang “Ave Maria” which is a beautiful song. The young lady was quite good for her age, but this is not a very appropriate song for a traditional church service and certainly not a song that will minister to anyone in this setting.

The second Sunday a man sang a hymn out of the denominational hymnal. The problem with most of the new hymns in this denominational hymnal is that they are not well

suiting for worship, and they are for the most part unsingable. Some pastors use these hymns because they like the lyrics but for the congregation they are not very valuable because they can't sing them. I'm sure that Martin Luther is turning over in his grave.

Attendance for each Sunday was seventy five people with most of the attendees sixty years old and older. This is when a church is ripe for closing when the majority of their attendees are retirement age and older. Somehow you need to find a way to draw some younger people and that is definitely hard to do. This church is one of those churches that need to have some kind of revival or they won't be around very long.

September 4, 2005

This summer while on a short trip to the Colorado Mountains I visited a church in a small western slope town. This is a church that is on fire for the Lord. They are probably a little to high profile for the community where they are located, but they are spreading the good news and that's the important thing.

In this church people raised their hands, said "praise the Lord," and sang and worshipped with a great deal of energy. Wow, a church that at least on the surface looked and sounded like they loved the Lord—what a pleasant experience. This church is one that most mainline church people would not want to attend—I'm not sure why—but I'm one who doesn't care how one worships I just care that they are worshipping the Lord and spreading the "good news.". The mainliners would have a problem with their exuberance and energy, and these people would have a problem with the mainliner's lack of that exuberance and energy.

When will we Christians ever get to the point that we are just excited about people worshipping the Lord and spreading His "good news" and quit worrying about how we do it? This is something I will talk about in future newsletters so stay tuned.

When I pulled up in front of the church there were only three cars there and I was only five minutes early. I get a little nervous when I see this. I wonder if I am going to be the only one there. I forgot that this was a small town and many of the people would be walking to church or would have more than two people in the car. I was warmly greeted at the front door and went into the sanctuary where I found a nicely decorated room with the trappings of a contemporary service and 53 chairs. Small, but very nicely kept. In the sanctuary most of the people came to greet me—how refreshing, I haven't seen much of this.

The praise band was well rehearsed and did an excellent job of leading us in worship. Actually they were better than most of the praise teams I have seen in the mainline churches that I have visited.

This church had the announcements after the praise music so the people in this community could know what was happening during the coming days and weeks.

After the announcement the pastor began his morning message. It was a rather long message and in reality he could have said everything he said in twenty minutes but he kept our attention for that period of time. I do believe in repeating things for reinforcement, but maybe not so many times.

At the end of the service the pastor met me at the back door and thanked me for coming and invited me to return when I was in town again.

This service was very alive and if other churches would take parts (not all) of this service and integrate them into their services (oh and do them well) we could begin turning the world around for Christ overnight. The Christian world would actually have alive Christians going away from worship ready to spread the Word.

October 9, 2005

Today I visited a traditional senior citizen church. This church meets in the clubhouse of a senior living complex. This is not an assistant living or nursing home complex but just town homes and condos where you have to be thirty five and older to purchase a unit. It's interesting to note that this was one of the more exciting services that I have attended.

I was greeted at the door by a number of people—handed a bulletin and there were ushers who helped me find a seat. It was hard to find a seat. The place was packed with people with white hair so I blended in well.

This is an interesting place in that it will always look like this—a sanctuary of people with white hair, but over the years the style of worship will slowly change. The people who come here will be new older people who have learned to worship in a different way so the style will have to change. It will be interesting to see. Will they fight over that change? I'm sure that they will just like any church, but they will change or they will die just like any church.

There was a lot of talking going on—the people were vibrant and alive. The prelude music was a spirited piano/organ duet. It was an old gospel song and the players (probably residents of the area) played it quite well. All of the people were dressed in their finest Sunday go to meetin' clothes, just like they did when they were younger. Did they know why they were there or were they just there out of habit and/or because they needed to see other people? I'm not sure, but I do know that they have a pastor who let them know what it meant to be a Christian.

They have a very traditional service and this Sunday they had a guest soloist who was excellent, but I wish she would have kept her eyes open. I expect anyone who is communicating with me to look at me.

They have a very active community and their bulletin showed it. It was crammed so full that you could hardly read it. Always leave some white space—our minds work better with a little less clutter.

The message was well organized and presented. This pastor (a retired Lutheran pastor I think) doesn't beat around the bush. He told them straight on what they needed to do to follow Jesus. How refreshing for a mainline type of church.

October 23, 2005

Today I visited a church that I had visited a number of times before and there are many reasons to keep returning. One reason is that they care about other people, not just themselves. They have a program that encourages the members to give a tithe (10% if you didn't know) but to divide it between the church and other ministries. They call it 5 and 5. They encourage you to give 5% to the church and 5% to another Christian ministry. I have never seen a church suggest this.

Statistically church members give the church 3% or less, so encouraging 5 and 5 is a way to get them to actually give more. I'm sure that many of them give a percentage of their income to other ministries, so encouraging them to give 5% to the church might be an increase, and it may even encourage people to give more than normal.

The church needs to find ways to get their parishioners to give more to the church since we are not living in a time when people have learned how to give to the church.

Interestingly, as much as I enjoy this church they have begun doing something that is beginning to trouble me—they have quit using a choir and a Praise Team and have gone to a STAR kind of worship leader. I have been to the church four times in the last six weeks and the choir has not sung once. Each time they have had one singer and a band, (they are excellent musicians) and the congregation has basically quit singing. There are a few people who sing but generally speaking the people have quit. I know that this is a personal prejudice of mine since I have been a music director for many years, but when the congregation quits singing there is a need to reconsider what you are doing.

I will continue to visit this church because they really do most things very well, but just like any church they will make mistakes at times and it's important the they continually evaluate what they do and its impact on their congregation.

October 30, 2005

This is the third time (not in a row) I have visited this church and I have yet to see or hear the Senior Pastor. I'm beginning to wonder if he is real. It is a mainline church that seems to be growing based on their recent building project, but I found little excitement or joy in what I have seen.

The parking lot is too small for a church this size and they share their main entrance with a legitimately growing church next door. On the opposite side of the church is another church that is dead so they don't have much competition for parking from them. There are maybe 8 to 15 cars in their parking lot on any given Sunday. Had I been consulting

with them I would have suggested that they either buy the church next door, which is dead, tear it down and use it for a parking lot, or sell their building and move to another location. Incidentally the growing church next door has purchased property to build a new building.

With a small parking lot I would expect someone out guiding traffic, helping people find a parking place. There actually might be some visitor parking but every space has been full when I arrive so I haven't seen any. So it is a challenge to find a parking space. If I were a true visitor I certainly wouldn't drive around the parking lot a couple of times to find a space, I would be on down the street to another church. Traffic people would be a great benefit.

So now I've found a parking space let's see how friendly they are. You walk in the front door and you are left to fend for yourself, there is no one there to help you find where to go. You can turn to the right and go to the Christian Ed rooms, but after you do this you will realize that you needed to go up the stairs to get to the sanctuary. Too bad there wasn't someone there to guide you. So you go up the stairs and the first people you meet are the people at the sanctuary doors handing out bulletins. They're friendly enough—I get my bulletin and go in.

I am there at 10:25 and there are only about 25 people in the sanctuary and there is no music to help set the mood. There is a brass group sitting on the platform talking to each other—too bad they are not playing something. Well 10:30 has arrived and the brass begin the prelude—oh well, so much for a prelude—I thought that was before the service began. The choir begins to come in during the prelude and some of the congregation actually quite talking in the narthex and enter the sanctuary.

When the prelude finishes the associate pastor gives the announcements—why would you give the announcements to the few people that are in the sanctuary--why not do them later in the service when more people are there?

This is a very traditional service with a very traditional, dead, boring choir. They actually sound fairly good, they just look like death warmed over. How sad.

It's too bad that they didn't have a music person who understood how to design the music portion of the sanctuary. They put the grand piano on the wrong side of the platform with the lid opening to the congregation. They could actually change this now.

They had an interesting way to take the offering. They had two ushers begin on the outside sections and the move to the center so it took quite a while.

Actually the associate pastor did a fairly good job with the message, but it was not something I would write home about.

I would probably put this church in the middle of the pack rating wise, but it is probably not a church that a visitor would return to unless they came with a member of the church and had a reason to return.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving and I'll see you in couple of weeks.

May the Lord truly bless you during this coming holiday season.

November 6, 2005

Today I visited a church that many years ago I helped start. The organizing pastor of this church was attending the early service of the church I was involved in and then going home to his basement at 11:00 to start another church. When he and his congregation made the decision to move out of the basement and into a rented space he called me and asked if I would provide music for them. After ascertaining that he was for real and preaching the Word I began sending special music from my choir to his service each Sunday. We did that until they were able to organize a choir. We also did a concert to raise money for handbells and they used music out of my church music library for a couple of years.

This was an exciting opportunity for my church and choir to help a church from another denomination get a start. I have always believed that we are Christians first and denominations second so I would help any church who preaches the Word.

This church has gone through a number of pastors and music directors over the years, but has stayed pretty constant in their membership. As you drive up to the building you realize that they do have one major problem—they didn't buy enough property for any expansion. They are on a corner with houses built next to them. Psychologically anyone attending will know that the church will have barriers and will not grow. This is not always bad and honestly in the denomination they are in they don't have many large churches.

I was politely greeted at the door and given a bulletin at the entrance to the sanctuary. I wasn't greeted as a visitor, and they should know because they are a small church. It is a church that seems to take care of themselves and maybe isn't looking for visitors. The congregation is on the older side with a few younger families with children. They had four children go down front for the children's message.

The pastor is fairly alive and did preach a very interesting message. I like the fact that he didn't have to stand behind a pulpit and the choir sat in the congregation and stood on the stairs to sing. The choir was pretty lifeless, but that was probably because their director is lifeless.



This is a mainline church that is pretty traditional but they do include some contemporary music and the pastor is full of life and makes the service joyful. I admit there haven't been many of the churches that I have visited where I went away feeling excited about life. Thankfully this was one.

November 20, 2005

My church visit this week was to a mainline community church that has a lot of potential but could benefit from some help with many aspects of their church life.

I was greeted at the door, but their parking lot is not too inviting--it was too full and there was no one to guide me to a parking space. It's a fact that when your parking lot is 80% full that visitors won't try to find a space. This lot was more than 80% full. (The interesting thing is that the sanctuary was not 80% full) The national average is a little less than two people per car and there is nothing that we can do about that so we have to have parking for that number of people. They need to have someone guide people in the parking lot. Another thing they might do is have all of the leaders park outside of the lot on the street or wherever and leave the lot for visitors and regular attenders.

The church is very well kept and is a very inviting space. I don't think I saw anyone that age in the service. It is very hard for a church to draw young people when all you see in the service is grey hair and that is basically what I saw. There is nothing wrong with grey hair--that's what I have--but an over abundance of grey hair sure does scare younger people away. This church had a youth handbell choir that played this morning, but I didn't see any people in the service that would be the parents of these students--where were the parents of the junior handbell choir members? They were probably teaching Sunday school classes and not being fed. Maybe they should have Sunday school at an earlier hour.

Concerning the message; it felt like the pastor didn't have enough time to prepare a message for that day so she quickly selected a scripture and improvised on it. Maybe I'm wrong but as a visitor after hearing that message I probably wouldn't return. There was one way that she could have made it a little more interesting and that would have been by using different versions of the Bible each time it was read (the same scripture was read four times). That would have brought it a little more to life. The different versions could have been printed on an insert which would allow the people to read it each time. I like interactive services and that was what she was doing but in my opinion she was not very successful. The other pastor had a much more commanding presence and made us all feel more comfortable.

They had a couple of sound problems which shouldn't have happened. Sound people are most often people who just want to help and they have run their stereo at home so they think that it is easy to do, or they are former sound people who ran sound for a rock band or in a studio and think they know it all and they just need a little caring guidance. The sound needs to be sound reinforcement and that is sometimes hard to understand. The EQ

on the ladies mics in the Praise Team put so much bass in their voices that they sounded like basses. The sound board was in a little room at the back of the sanctuary underneath an overhang so the sound person had to come out and listen and then go back and adjust for any problems and by that time it was too late. One thing that would help is to get the sound board out of that little room and have it where the sound person is sitting or standing over the board. The sound person has to be in a position to hear and fix.

This church has lot's of good music potential, but those people need to let the light of God shine through what they do in front of the congregation--their faces need to show the excitement of being a Christian and ministering in His name.

It's obvious that the church has a lot of things going for it but without some young people (20's, 30's and 40"s) the church will eventually die and none of us want that.

May the Lord truly bless you during this coming Christmas season.

November 27, 2005

Today I visited a church that at one time was one of the mainline mega churches in the Denver area, but has dwindled to practically nothing. I visited this church before about two years ago when they had an interim pastor and they now have a permanent pastor which has made them a little more stable.

This was the Thanksgiving holiday weekend so I figured that the sanctuary would be half full, but to my surprise it was quite full.

They have their Christian Ed classes during the main service so most of the young couples are teaching Sunday school and not in church. Maybe they go to the early service, I'm not sure. This is not a good way to run church. If they don't go to the early service then they are not being fed and that is very important.

More specifically about the church; the parking lot was at least 80% full and even the visitor spots were full. Incidentally, there are no visitor signs they just have visitor painted on the curb. They are impossible to see. Also there was only one person who stood up as a visitor even though all the spaces were taken.

I was greeted nicely at the door and at the sanctuary door with a bulletin. I went into the sanctuary at 10:25 and not a sound was heard except a few people talking. 90% of the folks who finally came to this service were 60 and older. There were very few younger people in the service.

At 10:28 a cacophony of chimes began playing and played for about one minute and then the organist began to play prelude. All of the music was very classical: there was a nice flute ensemble that played a Bach piece, the organist was okay, not great, but okay. The choir has great potential but they have an interim director who is totally lifeless—in fact he might be dead—and regrettably the choir looked and sounded just like him. They were

just slightly under the pitch in both pieces they sang. Oh well I guess that this is what you might expect in the church?

They had a large group of children who went to Sunday school after the children's message.

The associate pastor preached and was not bad; she just needs to have some help in her presentation. She has no inflection in her voice except loud. There is no excitement or energy to what she says because nothing ever changes in her voice.

This is probably not a church that I would have much interest in returning to since the service is not at all interesting. Too bad they had a fairly large crowd for a church that has suffered enormous losses over the years because of some denomination decisions.

December 4, 2005

Today I visited a mega church, a growing and full of life mega church. It is always fun to see the members greeting each other and being introduced to new people and to feel the excitement that should happen when you go to worship and that is what I got here. Don't get me wrong there are things in mega churches that need to be reworked but I have found that the mega churches are the ones where people are learning about Christ and going out and preaching the gospel to the world. In the smaller churches they are trying to protect themselves and somehow keep the church around until they die and not sending people out to preach to the world.

One thing I liked was that the people carried their Bibles and there were no Bibles in the pews. What I have found in the mainline churches is that they have Bibles in the pews so no one brings their Bible and they even tell the page number in the bulletin so the people don't even have to find the scripture. Actually the people probably don't even know where their Bibles are at home since they never open them and if they aren't encouraged to bring their Bible to church then what is the sense of even having one? I think revival will begin in America when we expect our members to bring their Bibles to church.

Okay I will get off of my soapbox.

One thing they didn't do was have people in their parking lot to guide traffic and the lot was very full. That would have been a plus. I would guess that the sanctuary holds 3000 people and was about two thirds full for the service. They have an amazing lighting system which they utilized well and sound system which was used as sound reinforcement and not sound blaster—how refreshing. They also utilized some excellent video production to reinforce the message and other parts of their ministry.

Their band and praise team were excellent. They knew how to present the music, how to make one piece flow into the next, and the flow into each of the spoken parts was well planned and kept your attention. Everything they did was planned to fit into the message

including their backdrop on stage. You had an idea when you walked into the sanctuary what the message was going to be about because of what you saw.

The entire service was filled with excitement and joy—the pastor had a great presentation style which included depth as well as time for laughter. This is what the church should be.

The congregation included all different ages and they all seemed to know what they were there for and that was to worship God. They even included middle school students to serve communion and take the offering. In the mainline churches that is a no-no.

The announcements were during the service after everyone was in so the community knew what was happening.

This is a church that I would be excited about going to again and even joining.

December 11, 2005

The church I visited today is one I have visited before and quite frankly they have a lot going for them. First of all the pastor is a very genuine person and his excitement and energy is very contagious. Honestly, if he were in an independent church without all of the restrictions of a mainline denomination his church would be growing by leaps and bounds. This pastor brings freshness to the ministry that I have hardly seen in any mainline church. I think that mainline pastors could learn from him. I love the way that he compliments and encourages everyone in the congregation. He is a pastor that is doing wonderful things for the Lord and will, I think, do even better when he moves on. When he does move on it will be a great loss for this church. As it is he has to go by the rules and will be tied down for the time being.

The parking lot is totally full and there is no room to grow the building or the parking area. The people greet visitors in a very caring way. There is a buzz in this congregation that I don't see in very many mainline churches. The congregation is generally speaking older, but they do have a small contingent of younger couples with young children.

There were two things in the sanctuary that I would change as quickly as possible and they are the sound system and the direction the baby grand piano is facing. The sound system is outdated and needs to be scrapped. It is very difficult to hear anything because of where the speakers are placed. This sound system was, many years ago, the best that was available, but with new speaker systems a lot can be done with just a few dollars. They also need to add some earphones for the hard of hearing. Concerning the grand piano; when the choir sings with the piano all of the sound will be going out to the congregation and the choir will not be able to hear the piano so they need to put the piano on the opposite side of the sanctuary so when the lid is lifted it will send the sound to the choir.

I just happened to visit on the Sunday of their Christmas Cantata so I will talk about that here. The most important thing I can say about a Christmas Cantata is if you use it in a service please let the cantata speak for itself. Pastor you don't need to even give a meditation on this Sunday. I know that that might feel uncomfortable, but just because you are there doesn't mean that you have to preach. Even if you call it a meditation you are in essence saying that the cantata is not enough and "I need to speak to make this service whole." Trust me if the cantata is well written and presented you need to let it speak for itself. Don't let your ego get the best of you. You should also do everything that needs to be done within the service before the cantata and end with the final piece of the cantata. You could have the congregation sing a final hymn, but it was a real let down to have a meditation, the announcements, the offering, and the pastoral prayer after the cantata and then end with a downer, not lyrically but musically, hymn. Regretfully by the time we had finished all of those things I had forgotten that we had just witnessed a cantata.

Now let's talk about the cantata and its presentation. I need to begin by saying that the choir, soloists and narrator did quite well and need to be commended for a job well done.

Here are my thoughts and suggestions:

You need to put an announcement in the bulletin that says: "Please hold your applause until the end of the cantata."

The choir is basically made up of people in my age bracket (I'm 64) and older, and many of those people have been in the choir for more than forty years and they are still doing a great job. I will note that the female section has gotten younger since the last time I visited (this is good).

It was a contemporary Christian cantata and was very meaningful word wise and musically. They performed it with an accompaniment tape or CD which I always like. If you don't have a live orchestra to accompany your cantata why not invite one in? The only problem's with the accompaniment was that it seemed like they didn't use any stage monitors, and the director kept having to cue the sound man to start. They might have used monitors but they were not always with the track. Singing with a track is quite difficult but it is manageable with practice. When you do a cantata with CD or tape you need to have a sound person who knows when to start the music so the director doesn't have to turn to them every time to cue them. This is very distracting.

Yeah, a choir that opens their mouths and let's the words (great diction) and the sound out. I don't see many of those.

This cantata lasted about thirty minutes (I think—I didn't time it) and the choir sat down after every piece. Even when the narration was fifteen to twenty seconds long and then had to stand up after the narration. How distracting. They could have stood for the entire time and it wouldn't have been so distracting. They also sat while they backed up a

soloist and you couldn't even hear them. Regretfully, most choir member sing with their noses in the music and when they were sitting the sound all went to the floor.

Another thing that I do is to get the choir closer to the congregation. I would have had the choir sing from the steps and have the narrator out from behind the pulpit and down on the main level. I also do some of the numbers from the aisles to bring you closer to the people. This creates the allusion that the performers are part of the congregation and not someone that is distant. It actually makes them feel like they are part of the whole.

Overall it was a pleasure to be at this church on this Sunday and I'm sure that everyone there felt the same way.

January 15, 2006

Today I had the privilege of attending a church that seems to be doing most everything right. I'll begin with the few things that they are not doing well, although these things don't seem to be hurting them. They are a growing Evangelical congregation having just remodeled their sanctuary and from a look outside their building they are still building. A look in their Worship folder shows that they are a very active church both inward and outward.

This is visit number 88. I wish each of you could be doing this. I think the face of the Christian Church would change quickly if all worship leaders were required to visit other churches at least four or five times a year.

Here is the short list: Their parking lot is not easy to navigate because of the building and the lines are almost gone so it's not easy to find a parking space. They didn't have anyone to help you find a parking space which would be a benefit for visitors. There was no one at the door to greet me, but there was a high school boy who was handing out bulletins who with a little coaxing said hello to me. In the sanctuary I was greeted by an older gentleman who walked up the aisle just before the service. As he went by he said hello because I looked at him. You know who that older gentleman was? He was the pastor.

The congregation was made up of people mostly in their 30's, 40's and 50's with a few younger and a few older. They even had their children in the service with Christian Education at another hour. The sanctuary was full—I would guess the sanctuary holds 500 excited people. There was a buzz around this sanctuary that I have only felt in about 5% of my visits. It was actually a good feeling.

This is a church that expects their congregants to bring their Bibles and they do. How refreshing.

They have an excellent sound system which for the most part is well under control except when the choir sang. The instruments covered the choir. If you are going to mic the instruments then you need to keep their volume down lower than the choir.

They started the service a little late because they were waiting for the pianist. They don't have any prelude before the hour they just begin on the hour. The choir and band began the service with a rousing anthem—what an exciting way to begin—although I wish they would have had music to warm me up as I came in. Now we are ready to worship. They have an in house band of brass, woodwinds, one string, guitars and trap set and they were quite good. Their choir of 21 was, with the exception of one lady, lifeless looking, but they did sing well. So I just closed my eyes for part of the music and it was okay. The choir was the Praise Team leader. They did have a Worship leader but he would get the songs started and then move away from the mic and let the choir director, who directed the choir on all of the praise songs, lead. It was a rather interesting way to do the music. The congregation sang with vigor and excitement. They did about 25 minutes of music during the service.

The pastor, an older gentleman (I have to be careful since he is probably not as old as me) gave an interesting message. It was 45 minutes long and could have been 20 to 25 minutes and been just as powerful. He gave most of the message from memory only occasionally using notes. He moved around on the platform and even sat on a stool for part of the message. I like this movement it helps the congregation stay alert. He effectively used slides to emphasize his points. With the use of Power Point you can say so much more in a shorter period of time.

The service concluded with an offering and an alter call and a small ensemble sang—they were excellent. The ending was bright and upbeat and sent the people out into the world to minister in His name. Overall this was a very worshipful time with well placed peaks and valleys and keeping the interest of the congregation. They had a time to ask them to turn their lives over to Christ if they hadn't and challenged them to live a Christ like life. The service was well planned and executed. All of the parts flowed together nicely.

I actually didn't feel like this church was very friendly. Even when I left no one spoke to me. I would probably go back again to see if another time might be different and I probably will. I'm sure that you think that I am schizophrenic because I have said it was a great church and it was bad, but even with the bad things I still felt the presence of the Lord more than I have at most churches I have attended.

January 22, 2006

This week I visited a mainline church that in its heyday was a going concern. Regretfully it is no longer in its heyday. To be sure the pastor is trying to turn the church around and I think he might be the one to do it, but it will take some time. It's obvious that this church is in a very deep rut and has many sacred cows so it will take lots of worn knees and patience on the part of the pastor to make this change. It looks like this church has more memories than dreams.

The service began at 9:45 with an organ solo, it said prelude but it was obvious that this was not a prelude it was a solo. Everyone got in their seats and the program began. Incidentally at the end of the service we sat down and had another organ solo, and then we clapped and left. It's interesting that the mainline church badmouths the Evangelicals for having performances by their soloists, praise teams and bands, but I can honestly say that I have never been to an Evangelical church where the service started with a "performance."

This was a service that had all of the parts but had no flow. It seemed to be broken up into a number of parts. You had what I just describe as the prelude---part one. Then we had a Choral Introit---part two. Then we took a break before the Call to Worship---part three. Then we did a Hymn of Praise---Part four. Do you see what I am saying? It just didn't hang together. There needs to be a continuous flow. There needs to be a purpose for everything and you have to be ready for the next thing when the last one is finished, don't let my mind wander for 30 seconds before you are ready for the next thing.

There were a few things about the sanctuary that could be corrected: There were between 80 and 90 people including the choir in the service in a sanctuary that could probably hold 425 people including the choir loft. The sanctuary looked bare. The people in attendance were generally in their 60's 70's and 80's. It's hard to grow a church without many young people. I would suggest that you make the people move down to the front of the sanctuary. I know that this is a difficult task with older people, but if you put room dividers about halfway down across the pews then they will have to move. The choir looked out of place in the large choir loft and they were hard to hear so I would bring the choir out of the loft and have them sit on the front pew and move to the stairs to sing. The more spread out the people are the less they become a community. Make them come together so they can see and touch each other.

This church tried to be friendly but I'm not sure that they know how. It's probably been so long since they have had visitors and they are so much a family and not a community that they don't know what to do. Hopefully this pastor will be able to affect a change in their attitude and create a Christian community.

It looks like there's not much happening at this church. A look at the bulletin and you see that there is not much happening that will help these people become stronger Christians and better at taking the ministry to the world.

They need to begin by making the service so exciting that the people can't sit still. They are just lifted out of their pews. Going to worship should be the most exciting thing that one does all week and it is obligation of the worship leadership team to make that happen. They need classes on being a Christian, finding my spiritual gifts, how to use my spiritual gifts and then get them out spreading the "Good News" to their community, their state and the world. These may all be happening but if you look at the bulletin they certainly aren't visible.

January 29, 2006



Today I visited a mainline church where the pastor was a breath of fresh air. His message was well prepared and his presentation was excellent. He also did a good job with the children's message. The only problem was when he did other parts of the service he did them in the dry drab traditional way. He needs to lighten those other parts of the service up. I think this pastor is an interim pastor who has a lot on the ball and could move this church forward.

It says on this church answering machine that the service I went to is the contemporary service and in all honesty as a visitor I wouldn't have known that it was supposed to be contemporary. Everything in the service was the normal drab traditional stuff. They could have had a band accompany the traditional hymns and it would have been more contemporary. It is important that you provide the service you say you are having. I went to that service dressed in a suit because I figure the people who go to the contemporary service will be dressed casually and I will stand out—well I fit right in, everyone dressed just like me and they were my age or older for the most part. There is nothing wrong with the older people coming to the contemporary service the only problem is that this should be a service that will attract the younger people. Incidentally, the liturgist was totally lifeless also.

I just came across this statement by Bill Easum: "What is your church doing that takes time, energy and money doing wonderful ministries but has nothing to do with insuring the church will still be there in 20 years when all the people over 60 are no longer in church." The mission field is right in our own sanctuaries and we need to begin taking care of that mission field.

Another quote I also heard recently was: "Does your church have more memories than dreams or more dreams than memories?"

It looks like they have plenty of parking and space in the sanctuary to grow an exciting congregation and the choir is certainly going the right direction—the interim pastor seems like a good person to help make a change for the better before he leaves so push ahead.

February 19 and 26, 2006

On these two Sundays I went to two mainline churches that were much alike. The one difference was that one church had the choir in the front and the other had the choir in the back. Neither church had a bulletin, at least not one that I could find. Both churches had a large contingent of children in the service, but neither had a children's message. I'm not saying that you need to have a children's message, but maybe with such a large population of children it might be good to have something that recognizes them in the service.

The February 19 attendance was a full house while the February 26 church was about one fourth full. No matter how many people were there, there wasn't much life in either service.

Both have choirs but I went to the wrong service for the one choir so I will have to go back and visit again when the choir is singing. The church without a choir had three people singing, two males and one female. Regretfully the female was not a soloist. She sang out of tune most of the time and that goes against my philosophy about giving our very best. I believe that God cared enough to send His very best. He sent His number one Son and He expects us to give our very best. You need to have someone who can sing in tune with some kind of feeling or you should not have anyone sing. The two men were quite good and would have been just right by themselves.

In the other church the choir seemed to be there to back up the choir director as she led the singing. She stood in front of the microphone and she was basically all you could hear. The choir didn't sing anything special so as far as I was concerned they didn't need to be there.

There was no one greeting people at the door at either church so I'm not sure how welcome we really were.

The messages were from 10 minutes to 17 minutes in length and both were from memory. Both were well prepared, well presented and to the point. One pastor came down into the aisle which made it much more personal while the other did his from the pulpit.

These two services were very much alike. There was not much excitement or energy in either service and since there was not a bulletin I'm not sure if they have any ministries that minister to anyone but themselves.

As a visitor there wasn't anything that would entice me to return to either church.

March 26, 2006

This can be the most exciting thing in the world—visiting a new church each Sunday—or at least a couple of Sunday's a month, and today was one of those exciting times. Last Sunday I visited a church where some choir members said to me after church that they wondered who that was in the congregation that was dancing—it was me, while this Sunday they should have asked me who the stiff was in the congregation.

Last week I visited a mainline church that I have visited many times and I always look out of character because I get with it when I worship. This church currently has an interim minister who is making some changes and they are making progress, but they still have a long way to go. We'll see what happens.

This week I visited an African American church where they get with it in worship (the pastor even said that worship should be 24/7—wow, that’s what I have said for years and always get the evil eye in the mainline church) and I found out that I need to learn how to move here. I went from a church that is very meditative to a church that reminds me of a football game and they are obviously on the winning team. It’s too bad that more churches aren’t on the winning team and celebrating worship like this church.

They meet in an office building and don’t have enough parking so people park up and down the street which is a problem for guest. I wish churches would consider the parking issue when they look for a place to meet. They do have a few guest parking spaces in front of the building, which is good. The sanctuary holds about 300 and was virtually full for the second service on this day. I was greeted at the front door with a smile and a hand shake from a young white gentleman and was greeted and given a bulletin by a young African American lady at the sanctuary door. This is not a totally black church, there are a few whites and they even have one white pastor. How refreshing.

When I arrived in the sanctuary there was a young man praying for the service and he continued to pray until the Praise Team entered. How many of you have your prayer warriors praying for the service before, during and after the service? That might be something to consider.

They have a wonderful Praise Team. The pastor is the keyboardist with seven singers and three percussionists. They were amazing. If you looked at their faces you knew where they were in their Christian walk. They were truly lead worshippers.

If you have never been to an African American worship service you need to experience it. This is an interactive service where the congregation is as involved as the pastor and the Praise Team. The congregation sings with energy, and they respond to the pastor’s message like they are actually alive and not the “frozen chosen.” How exciting. I know that many of the “frozen chosen” would be nervous if they went to this service, but I believe their worship is how God wants us to worship.

This church was loaded with smiling faces throughout the congregation and I was greeted a number of times within the service and after the service as I left.

This is a church where the people bring their Bibles. They have none in the chairs—the people had their own—which is refreshing. The pastor said the book and verse for the scripture and gave the people a few seconds to find it and went on with his message. In my opinion this is what needs to happen in all churches before a religious revival will begin. We need to bring our Bibles and find the scripture. How exciting would that be?

This is a church filled with joy and laughter. This pastor really knows how to present God’s message in a meaningful, joyful and fun filled way.

This service lasted two hours and five minutes and it flowed so smoothly that you didn't know how long it lasted until you looked at your watch. It certainly didn't seem like two hours.

One thing I couldn't find was a Guest Table. I'm not sure if they had one so I don't know too much more about the church.

Either email me or give me a call and I will tell you the name of this church so you can visit.

May the Lord truly bless your ministries.

April 2, 2006

Today I visited a mainline, Liturgical church. This church recently had a write-up in the local newspaper about how forward looking they were and from the article I would figure that I was going to a church that was on the forefront of change and probably ahead of where most churches are in 2006. Oh well so much for what the paper said. This is a church where you would walk out the door and ask; would I ever want to return to this church again? Guess what; that is exactly what my wife asked me. The answer would be NO! My wife also asked me; why would anyone want to come to this church? My answer—I didn't know.

Let's see, what did I see that was good? The parking lot was full which is usually a good sign. I was greeted at the front door by a couple of older people and at the sanctuary door by a younger person who gave me a bulletin. So far so good. We entered the sanctuary to the sour notes of a pianist who obviously hadn't practiced. Okay, that happens at times, but it got worse.

Well much to my dismay the service started with the announcements and the people in the narthex were so loud that we couldn't hear them. Thank you, someone closed the door so we could hear. If you have read my thoughts about worship you will know that I don't like the announcements at the beginning because you miss a portion of the congregation who is not in the sanctuary yet, and sure enough there were a number of people in the narthex who didn't hear the announcements. Is this something that pastors do on purpose so they can complain when people don't attend their events? I often wonder about that. Please do the announcements within the service so everyone gets to hear them. Announcements are an important part of the community—make sure that the congregation hears them. We have to hear something at least seven (7) times before it really sinks in. If your announcements aren't for the church community then why are you giving them in the first place?

It's time to get off of my soap box and get on with the service.

Neither the choir nor the praise team was there this morning (how sad—this should never happen) so the pastor strapped on his guitar and he and the pianist accompanied the first

chorus. First of all this was not a song that was singable by the congregation and second if I weren't in church I wouldn't have any idea what it was about. It never made any reference to whom or what church is for. This is the way it started and it went downhill from there. For the most part the songs were unsingable and meaningless.

This pastor is a pastor after my heart. He made sure that everything went very rapidly—the only problem was that he went so fast that no one could keep up with him. That's the way the entire service went.

The children's message was very well done. It was on a level that the children could understand.

Everything was in the bulletin so nobody needed to bring anything with them which is fine, but it doesn't encourage anyone to use their Bible's and if they don't use them at church then they will certainly not use them at home. This again is one of my personal prejudices—I think we need to begin to get the people to use their Bibles at church and at home. You're right, I need to get off of my soapbox.

Uh oh—back on my soapbox. All of the prayers were written—there were none that were spontaneous—if that's what we teach the congregation about prayers at church what will they do at home—written prayers or no prayers at all? I would guess the latter.

The pastor's message was one of anger as far as I could tell. He talked about being in the world and not of the world and in essence said that the church should be all about feeding and housing the poor and never once said anything about who we should follow in our quest to help the people around us. The message was read at breakneck speed and ended as abruptly as it started.

The offering; interestingly enough they didn't have enough ushers for the entire sanctuary—not sure why—so one side had to hand the plates to the row behind. Oh well. Incidentally there were pew pads for the congregation to sign in on but no one ever told us to do it. The pads were picked up with the offering and regretfully in our pew the pad wasn't sent down until the usher came to my pew and I just gave it to him without signing it. Again that's an “oh well so much for welcoming visitors.” They never did welcome the visitors in any way. The only time anyone spoke to us was during the passing of the peace.

When we left the sanctuary not a single person said anything to us. We stopped at a table that had some information about the church on it but there wasn't anyone there to talk to so they missed a chance to greet a visitor.

Regretfully this is exactly the way that 90% of the 93 churches that I have visited have been and I would guess that that 90% would say that they are the friendliest church in town. Regretfully that's what they really think.

I'm not sure how the church will survive if this is how the majority of churches that are out there are functioning, and so far it seems like that's what it is.

April 16 & 23, 2006

On these two Sundays I attended the two locations of the same church. Hope that makes sense. These are two churches that I enjoy visiting because they are churches that understand the purpose of growth and ministry and do the things that make them possible. They understand that growth is not a sin and growing is what every church should be doing. God didn't tell us to start a church and then quit talking to people he told us to go into all the world and preach his gospel to win new converts for his kingdom.

These are two of the churches that I recommend for people to visit if they really want to know what the church should be. They both epitomize what the church should be.

I'm not saying that these two churches are perfect—there aren't any perfect churches. I don't know of any church that doesn't have something to learn or won't have things to learn in the future

One thing that both pastors said at the end of the beginning music was; wasn't worship wonderful. It was like we now left worship and went into the preaching mode. I know I am a little kooky about this but I firmly believe that worship begins at 12:00 am on Sunday and goes until 11:59:59 on the following Saturday when it begins again. Okay, I gave you 1 second that wasn't worship. If we made worship a 24/7 thing it would turn our lives around in no time and the people around us would wonder what happened to us. I guess it's time to get off of my soapbox.

Here are a few other things that I noticed during my visits. I went to the first church on Easter, one of the two most popular days for the Christian church, and they ran out of visitor packets before the first service. This is a Sunday that you have to have everything that you would give a visitor in abundance and they didn't. There were a number of visitors waiting to get one when I asked and they just said that they were sorry. If by chance you run out you need to begin collecting names and addresses and send them packets.

Also on this Easter Sunday the parking lot was a mess. There were way too many people to get in and out of the parking lot easily without someone guiding traffic. They did have a police officer in the street guiding traffic but the lot would have been easier to navigate if there had been help there.

In all honesty I am having to nit pic here because they do so many things so well.

After going to these two churches I truly feel like I was able to worship God and that after these services I was ready to go into the world.

95 churches and counting.

Blessings on you. See you in two weeks.

May 7, 2006

Today I visited two churches. The first one was a church which I have visited many times, partly because it is just a few blocks from my home and also because most of what they do is so good. I didn't say they were perfect I said that they do so many things so good. There are few things they do that will turn guest away, but for the most part they do a wonderful job. Last Sunday they said that this Sunday they were going to give the congregation a hint of what their next church plant would look like so I had to go to see what they were talking about. What they presented was a bilingual service with a Hispanic praise team that did the songs in English and Spanish and a sermon that included both an English speaking pastor and a Spanish translation right before our eyes. It was actually quite exciting and well done. I can't wait until their third church is planted.

This service did highlight what I have a problem with in some praise teams. The evangelicals and praise teams get badmouth constantly because they use contemporary music that the mainliners say only talks about "me" and not our relationship with God and their praise team leaders, from both of their current churches highlight this problem. They do almost all of their music with their eyes closed which makes it look like they are only interested in themselves and they are not interested in leading the congregation in worship. Closing your eyes and singing is great in a night club where you are being introspective, but in church you are trying to lead the congregation and how can you lead anyone with your eyes closed?

I recently came across a saying that went like this; "If you can do something with your eyes closed you need to find something else to do." I think that this saying is true in praise team leading also. If you went to church and the pastor did all of their messages with his/her eyes closed how much would you get out of them? That's right, nothing. The same is true of the music lead worshippers. They need to open their eyes and make contact with me.

One other thing that troubled me about the service was the final song where the lighting guy was reading a book and didn't turn a light on the singer so he was in the dark the entire time.

Oh well they do so many things so well I can't complain much.

The second church I attended (#96) was a small church that is probably having a hard time staying alive because they are so small that they must be struggling to pay a full-time pastor. Even with their small size they do some things very well.

They only have 40 parking spaces in their lot with maybe five extra spaces in a graveled area. They also have on street parking but guests don't usually park there. In those 40 spaces they had 26 cars when I went in--I'm not sure how many more came after that.

The sanctuary had moveable chairs and could hold approximately 180 people give or take a few (this is my guess). For the service there were probably 70 people (this is a guess also I didn't actually count). They had a wide variety of ages in the congregation. They were definitely not a congregation with only gray hair.

As I entered the building I was warmly greeted with a good morning and a bulletin. As I moved toward the sanctuary another person asked me if this was my first time and gave me a guest packet. Well done. The guest packet didn't include what it needed, but this was a great start. I walked into the sanctuary and people greeted me even getting up from their chairs to greet me. They all knew I was a guest because I was the only one wearing a suit.

At about three minutes past the beginning time a group of four folks got into a circle holding hands in the front of the sanctuary. Their heads were bowed so they were obviously praying. I admit my first thought is that this is the praise team and sure enough it was. They were doing the normal praise team thing, being conveniently late. Regretfully this happens in too many churches. The service began at eight minutes after the hour. If I am a guest I'm wondering about this. The praise team consisted of two singers; one who also played the guitar and was the leader, a trap set player and another guitarist. The praise team was actually very good but the sound system left a little to be desired. They were very hard to understand and so was the pastor. I would guess that they need new main speakers even though they were Bose which are usually quite good.

It was interesting that the praise team leader never asked the congregation to stand for any of the music although a number of the people did. As a guest I would have a difficult time knowing what to do so I did what a guest would probably do, I stayed seated. I'm not sure what they wanted me to do. This may be something that they've always done and out of habit it has stayed that way. I would recommend that they do every service like they are expecting guests and say to the congregation; "If you would like to stand during the songs you can or you may remain seated." that would take care of the problem. The praise team didn't have any flow to what they were doing—they would finish one song and then we would wait until they were ready to begin the next—they need to work on some bridges and what they do would have a much better flow. The majority of the congregation didn't sing except on songs that were very familiar and the lead worshippers didn't know because they had their eyes closed.

The person who ran the power point to project the words on the screen was not alert and there were times when they never changed. They need to work on this aspect. This is something that would happen in a small church, but if you are a church that wants to grow then you need to act like a large church and iron out these problems.

They did most of their announcements during the singing time well into the service.



The pastor's message lasted 41 minutes (he started a timer on the pulpit when he began) and was more like a Bible or a book study. It was actually very informative, but probably something I would give in a men's Bible study class. Actually, after this message I as a guest wouldn't return. One thing the pastor does well is to encourage the congregation to respond to ideas and questions. This pastor seems like a very nice guy who really has a love and concern for his congregation, but as a guest I felt like he was a counselor and not a pastor. He was very soft spoken in fact so soft spoken that he was sometimes hard to hear. He talked to the people like he was in their living room or his office counseling them. He included places for laughter within his message so the congregation was quite relaxed. The pastor needs to work on his presentation—I think he probably has a lot to offer but he needs to become a better presenter.

The most interesting thing about the service was the way it ended. Just before the timer got to 40 minutes the pastor quickly stated his final two points, said a prayer and said have a good day and we were finished. There was nothing to send us out into the world to carry and minister the word. I'm taking it for granted that this is the way every service ends. Give us a challenge and a song to "cheer" us on, don't just leave us hanging. As I left one person spoke to me and I walked out the door. If they want guests to return they need to do a better job on the back end. They did quite well on the initial sell, but forgot the close.

I would say that this church will not be able to grow on this corner; they need to sell their building and move to another location or resign themselves to the fact that they will languish here and die. It doesn't look like they own enough property to expand their current facilities. Eventually they won't be able to afford a pastor. This may be what God has in mind but I don't honestly believe that God wants any church that is preaching the word and spreading the gospel to die.

See you in a couple of weeks.

May 14 and 21

The Phantom Pew Sitter was idled by the time of the year for the last two Sundays. On Mothers Day he went to a church that he visits quite often with the mother of his four children and May 21<sup>st</sup> he was compelled to go watch his seven year old grandson play in a soccer tournament. He played two games that morning, one at 9:30 and one at 11:30 so it just wiped out any time for church. He did quite well in both games—although they don't keep score at that age. He plays hard and has fun doing it so that is what is important.

I feel somewhat like Barry Bonds as he was trying to tie Babe Ruth's homerun record. He was stuck on one short for a number of days. I am at 96 visits and am looking forward to hitting 100 soon—maybe four or so more weeks. We'll see.

In the next couple of weeks I will give you a list of the top fifteen churches that I would recommend you visit if you want to find out what worship is. These will all be in the Denver, Colorado Springs and Boulder, Colorado area.

I will talk about the Mothers Day service though; my wife and I visited the 9:15 Upper Room service where you sit around tables and view the service live and on video monitors. The service has its own praise band and lead worshipper and you view the message from the main sanctuary on the monitors.

They have a coffee and donut/bagel shop which makes everything more people friendly. They also have a question which you answer around your table. For some people that is a way to break the ice, but for others it might be a little uncomfortable although there is no pressure to answer the question. You can remain silent if you like. This is a service that it would be easy to invite a friend to—the lights are turned down low which allows you to be almost incognito.

This is a growing church with around 2400 in attendance each weekend at two Saturday evening services and three Sunday morning sanctuary and Upper Room services. They obviously have most everything together. There are a few things that I would change, but for the most part they provide a wonderful ministry and regularly bring new people to the Lord. This church is community oriented, and they already have or have planned a few “satellite” churches in the future.

Pray for me as I continue to help churches both struggling and growing move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I will continue to pray for your ministries. Be on the lookout for a Phantom Pew Sitter card in your sanctuary one of these weekends.

I'll see you in a couple of weeks.

Ken Johnson

June 4, 2006

Well, number 97 and it's both exciting and depressing. This latest church visit left me wondering what could happen with the Christian faith if we were able as Christians to put it all together and show the world what and who we are. This church has some really good aspects but they are also struggling with a number of things.

During the week I decide on a church to visit and do as I think a visitor would do. They would find the phone number in the directory and call on Saturday night to listen to the message which tells them of the church activities for the week, including the times of the Sunday morning worship services—right? Yes that is right and so I would expect the church to have a readily available phone number in the directory. This church has been on that corner for a number of years so obviously there is information in the directory—wrong. I had my wife write the name of the church down on Friday night as we drove by so I know that we got the right name. Oh well. So I call information and they give me a

number and even dial it for me, and guess what, it's the FAX number. So I call information again and make them stop when they say they will dial it for me and tell them of the FAX number predicament—well they say that that is the only number they have.

Okay, I will go to the church, it's only three miles away and look on the sign again to see if there is any information about the service, anyone who would be a first time guest would do that wouldn't they? Probably not! They would find another church to go to, but I was going for a different reason so, I went. Well I got to the church and sure enough there was nothing on the sign about services—there was room but the sign had a saying on it. What is more important; information about when your services are, or a saying?

Okay, next I will go to the church building and get the information off of the door, surely there will be something there. As I approach the front of the building I see that on the left side of the door there is lot's of writing, good, this will tell me something. ---Oh well, all it has is information about another congregation who meets in the building so I go to the other side of the door and it has the name of the church and under it it says "Wheelchair accessible." This is useful information but not helpful to me because I want to go to a service. Well, what do I do now? I go back home and try to figure out what to do.

I have already decided that this wasn't always the name of the church so I go to my next plan of attack which is to go through the Yellow Pages and find the former name and surely the phone number will be there. Yeah, Praise the Lord there it is and the only difference between the FAX number and the church number is the very last number is different so I am able to call the church and get the needed information.

I only write this about the problem with finding the number because it is something that I run into frequently. Churches are so hard to get information for. You need to make it so easy that a "caveman" who just came out of the cave could easily get the information. Why hide the information? If you are going to change your church name make it coincide with the release of a new telephone directory. On your sign you should have the new church name and say formerly... Do this for a number of months before and after you change the name.

I usually get to the church about 15 minutes early so I can see who arrives, how they arrive, what the ages of people are and if they are carrying a Bible. Here's what I saw: The majority of the people were 50 and older, many of them had their Bibles, there were no young children although there may have been some in the church already, there were either 1 or 2 people in a car, and they greeted each other warmly like a family. In many respects it was a typical American church.

I am warmly greeted at the front door and at the doors to the sanctuary as I am handed a bulletin. I assumed that this was a contemporary church so I have worn a suit and tie and there isn't another soul dressed like me. I do this intentionally so I will be noticed as a guest. Almost immediately I am greeted by a lovely older lady (who I find out later is the keyboardist for the praise team and the pastors wife) what a good feeling as a guest.

When I walk in I can tell there is going to be some excitement and energy here because they are playing some exciting upbeat Contemporary Christian music and there is a buzz in the sanctuary. Yes this is a great start, but regretfully this must be a ruse. About three minutes after the hour by my watch the praise band begins, I think this is the prelude, it is a jazz styled piece which is very soft and somber (they have just killed any excitement and energy that created as I entered the sanctuary). Don't get me wrong the band was excellent and what they played was excellently played, but all they did was build me up to let me down. The praise singers enter and one of them tries to get the congregation back into the upbeat mood, but it didn't work very well—she did her best. In essence we started the service with a whimper—let's see where we go from here.

The praise music is good, the band is good, the words on the screen are good, but the praise leader who I think probably has the potential to do a good job needs some help. She doesn't know how to be the lead worshipper and lead people into a different place. In fact she even says the right words most of the time, but she just doesn't say them in a way that would inspire someone to move into that other place. She also leads everything with her palms up which doesn't give a feeling of strength it gives a feeling of weakness. She doesn't give us the feeling of leadership but a feeling of a follower. She can improve this easily and quickly with a little help. They have a good start on this style but it will take some watching other good praise teams do worship leading or a coach to improve this aspect of the ministry. The core is there, the facial expressions, the body expressions from the entire group are there they just need some refining.

During the greeting time there were a number of people who introduced themselves to me and invited me to join the choir. That is exactly the way you get new people to sing in your choir by having choir members invite them.

After the praise music the pastor begins the message which was well prepared and well presented. The one thing that would have helped the message would have been to use power point. That would have solidified the entire message. The problem was that the projector was not up in the air so the pastor would have been in the light if they had used it so I would hang the projector so it can be used anytime.

Okay, we have sung some upbeat choruses, the pastor has preached an upbeat message now what do we do from here. The first thing they did after the message was give announcements and the offering and we ended with communion. Hopefully the communion will emphasize the resurrection, which is the most important part anyhow, and have an upbeat ending to the service. Oh well—I guess since we started with a whimper we need to end with a whimper. The song during the communion was a song that is a little upbeat but the singer, who has a wonderful voice, made it a slow somber song. Too bad. With communion I start the process slow and somber because of the resurrection and then end with upbeat signifying the resurrection, but not here. Then we ended with a very slow somber final hymn. So much for sending the disciples out with excitement and joy to minister to the world—the excitement I saw when I entered is now

gone. You should go to church with holy expectations and leave with those expectations fulfilled and ready to go out and win the world for Christ. Oh well.

By the way I checked in the narthex for a packet of materials for guests and couldn't find anything. They may have had some but they were hidden. They actually had a table that looked like a guest table but it didn't have anything on it.

I usually never introduce myself to the pastor or anyone else and tell them what I am doing there, but after talking to a congregation member that I knew I felt I needed to tell the pastor about who I was hoping that he would contact me and I could tell him about this person and problems that he and his wife have created in other churches. I'm not sure what will come from this. It may be something for a future Pew Sitter article.

I'm sorry that this was so long but this was a church that has a lot of upside potential and I wanted to let you know what kinds of things can go wrong in churches even when they have great potential. In my short stay at this church I felt a warm feeling with lots of buzz, but I also felt like there is something lurking there that can be hurtful.

I'll see you in a couple of weeks.

Ken Johnson

June 18, 2006

Well I'm still on #97 because I visited a church that I had visited once before. This is a mainline church that was fairly successful at their old location so they built a new building and moved about 18 months ago. They are still growing and are a very active church that has a lot of things going for them, but I'm not sure how much Christianity is being spread around there. I think that they are probably more of a social club than a church.

They did receive an "A" for one thing—there was a person sitting across the aisle from me who heard me singing and invited me to choir. These are the kinds of things I look for and I told her that she passed.

Let's go from the beginning: There was a police officer guiding traffic on the street, people guiding traffic in the parking lot—the lot was more than full—too bad they didn't build a parking lot big enough in the first place; a wonderful greeting at the front door and the sanctuary door, but no one to help find seats when the sanctuary was full, and it was full when I arrived. They have four services on Sunday morning and this service was full before it began. They obviously didn't build the sanctuary big enough.

The congregation was more like a family—a group of people who knew each other and only talked to each other. They all wore name tags so they knew who the visitors were and also I just wore a pair of slacks and a shirt (I also wore shoes and socks) while most of the men had ties on so this also helped them know who the visitors were. Incidentally,

the pastor mentioned at the end of the service that a guest a couple of weeks ago had mentioned that the congregation was not very friendly—a clue about how friendly they were.

I only saw one person with a Bible as they were entering the building which probably shows how much the Bible is used around the member's homes. There was no buzz around the sanctuary or the building like I usually hear in the going churches.

They have a pipe organ, or at least the pipes for people to see, which was well played. They had a choral introit by a women's choir that was too long—the choir was not good. They actually moved out of the loft (I like this) and sang from the platform but the acoustics were so bad they were hard to hear. They sang another couple of times in the service and they weren't any better—the main problem was the director—too bad. There were probably 50 ladies in the ensemble—lot's of promise.

The service was very traditional and very boring and the congregation looked like they were not too interested, it reminds me of 30 years ago but we had more excitement than they had. The pastor had an interesting message but he is just not very interesting to listen to or to watch. He did do his message from in front of the pulpit but he had it on 8.5 X 11 paper and read it. No freedom or spontaneity. They do have three projection screens for words of hymns and other unison readings, and the pastor even showed a bit of a movie that he was preaching about. This did give us a feeling of the contemporary, but they obviously don't know what the screens are for. They even had one in the back for the people on the platform to see so it looked like they had visited some contemporary churches to experience what they do.

The service is filled with unison readings and written prayers—absolutely nothing spontaneous so it was rather mundane. They are definitely a growing church that teaches “feed the hungry and house the poor,” but I'm not sure how much more. I would have to spend a little more time to find out if they are doing more than “feeding the hungry and housing the poor.” The Bible says; “preach my gospel” and to “save their souls” not just “feed the hungry” and “house the poor.” Those are important things but we also need to change their hearts, minds and souls.

See you in a couple of weeks.

I will be praying for your ministries please be in prayer for mine.

In Hi steps

Ken Johnson

6-25-06

Today is number 98—getting closer to 100 all the time. Today’s church is doing many things very well they are a solid 4 on my 1 to 5 scale. This is a church that I would recommend people go visit.

I called the church on Saturday night and the message was complete and pleasant to listen too. That one thing will many times make it more inviting for your guests and it so easy to do.

On Sunday morning I arrive about 15 minutes before the service and back in to a space in about the middle of the back row of the lot. At this time they have plenty of parking and they still did when I entered, but when I left at the end of the service the lot was totally full, not a good sign for future growth. There is a school across the street that has parking and in fact I saw one person park there and walk across the street. They may need to ask their leaders to park there to free up space in their lot.

One thing I look for is how many people are carrying their Bibles—I would say that 75% of the people that I saw were carrying Bibles. Why do I look at this? Because I have found that the more people that bring their Bibles to church the better the chances are that they are using them at home. This looks like a Bible type church.

They have two doors and I’m not sure which one is to the sanctuary (there aren’t any signs that give me any indication) so I go the nearest door. Oh well, it’s the door to the Christian Education area. As I walk through the parking lot a gentleman notices that I have on a suit and tie, (I do this on purpose—dress differently than they would) greets me, and asks if I am new. He receives an “A.” He also led me to the sanctuary when we got in. They have greeters at each of the doors and at the sanctuary doors—in fact an overabundance of greeters—that was excellent. This gentleman even asked me if I wanted to meet the pastor and invited me to Sunday School class after church—he gets another “A” in fact maybe an “A+.”

By the time the service started the sanctuary was about two thirds full—a good crowd, but a problem with parking. There was a good mix of young families and older people and a large contingent of children and teenagers.

I got inside the sanctuary at about 5 minutes before the service was to start and there was no music playing the members were all talking and there was that exciting buzz that I enjoy hearing. Granted they were only talking to their friends but they were talking. Too bad they didn’t have some music playing. The Praise Team arrived at 9:00 sharp—what is it about Praise Teams that won’t allow them to be early? I’ll never know.

They begin the first song and for the most part the congregation didn’t sing—it looks like the Praise Team doing it all for the congregation. Oh good Then the congregation begins to sing during the second song. I guess they didn’t know the first song. That means that the Praise Team needs to teach them the song, not just let them learn as they go. The congregation did sing quite well. Thankfully only two of the Praise Team people closed their eyes. Oh how I wish they would keep their eyes open and lead in worship not have

their own private worship. Would you like it if your pastor did his message with his eyes closed—you are doing the same thing he is doing except in song.

After the praise songs the pastor did the announcements—when the entire congregation was in place—this is the way I like it. The community got to hear the announcements.

They had a skit that pertained to the message before the message. The skit was quite well done.

The message was well prepared mostly from memory. I'm not sure from a guest's point of view that a five part series on the family would get me back the next Sunday, but it was well done. When he got to the end of the message he quickly said let's pray. I would have liked it if he would had tied it all together—oh well it was a good message otherwise. He also didn't give the people an opportunity to pray with someone if they were in need of prayer or assistance. Usually in this style of church the pastor gives the people an opportunity to pray with someone if needed.

The Praise Team got into place during the prayer and sang a downer song to end the service—they didn't send me out with my feet above the ground. They did a good job on the song it just didn't take me anywhere except to sleep. I want you to send me out with excitement and joy to minister to the world.

I went out into the Narthex and found the guest table where I asked if they had a packet of materials for guests and the lady said as far as she knew they didn't. She gave me a little three fold that brochure that gave me some information, but I asked her why they didn't have a packet and she said she didn't know. Oh well.

In all honesty even though I had the only suit and tie in the building not many people greeted me—they need to do a little work on this aspect of their church. They were very friendly to each other, but not to guests.

Back in the parking lot—I drove around and as far as I could tell there were no guest parking spaces. They did have a few handicap/senior spaces but no guest spaces.

Some suggestions: have people in your lot guiding traffic; have the leaders park across the street; play music (CD's) before the service; make the Praise Team start the service on time—they need to be in place before the hour: I would also have the Praise Team move forward to the front of the platform—get closer to the congregation; make sure that your Praise Team teaches the congregation any new songs; provide your guests with a packet of materials about your church; they could use some signs to indicate sanctuary and Christian education: you need to teach your congregation how to be more guest friendly (notwithstanding the gentleman who greeted me in the parking lot and the lady at the guest table).



The one thing that I did miss, and it may be there but was not evident, was any outreach. It looked like they were more in-reach than outreach. I hope I am wrong. They had all kinds of things going on for their members but not much for their local community.

Overall I was truly ministered to in worship. Thanks for the ministry that you provide.

May the Lord Bless your ministry

Ken Johnson

7-9-06

I'm getting closer to the century mark. Today is #99 and probably the most interesting of all in one aspect; I visited a church in a denomination that I know nothing about. I admit I was rather nervous as I drove up to the church, got out of my car and walked to the front door. After I spent the next hour in the church I realized that there was no reason to be nervous, because the church was just another mainline church. I was looking for more—I'm not sure why—but I was. From what I've read since this is a denomination that doesn't have many congregations and those congregations are for the most part very small.

This pastor is a very polished speaker and his message was excellent, so if they can get some other things straightened out I think this could be a going church. The pastor's wife who gave the children's message is also gifted as a speaker.

Let's start with the building and the parking lot. They had two guest spaces—there was no one parked in them—but they were there. From the outside I saw just a traditional church building and grounds which were very well kept. There was plenty of parking for the number of people in attendance and extra spaces so they have room to grow, but they won't be able to grow too much because they don't own enough property. For them to grow they will have to move or plant other churches.

It didn't seem like many people carried Bibles into the church and they didn't have any pew Bibles. Oh well who needs a Bible?

At the front door there was a gentleman to greet me and other people inside who greeted me. I and the pastor were the only ones who wore suits so everyone knew I was a visitor and before the service and during the greeting time they did well greeting me, but after the service no one talked to me except the person who I asked for information about the church from. Incidentally, they didn't have a guest packet or anything about the church for me to take home. I also didn't give them my address and phone number.

Their sanctuary probably held between 100 and 125 people and they had 55 in attendance. It looked pretty empty.

Let's talk about the service. Their sound system left a lot to be desired. It sounded like I was in an echo chamber the entire service. They need a new speaker system. As many churches do they gave the announcements at the exact time the service was to begin and there were many people who were not there yet. That's too bad because those people missed a time of their seven that they need to hear the announcements. Oh well.

Except for the message the service was lifeless—a throwback to the 40's, 50's and 60,s worship services. A husband and wife sang an old gospel hymn for the prelude that I would have heard in the early 50's and the wife stood with her hand in her pocket. They also sang a song later in the service which was a little more modern but with the same lifeless faces. They had a number of dead spots in the service when people weren't in place on time. It's important to be in place and ready to go when it is your turn.

As a guest am I ready to come back next week? NO!

The hymns and choruses were equally as lifeless. There was a lady leading them from behind the pulpit—even directing with the proper beat but with no facial expression at all. Even if the hymns would have been upbeat she kept them slow enough to put us all to sleep. Oh well maybe next Sunday.

Their entrance is a joint entrance for two churches. They do have an entrance in the back that enters into the neighborhood, but if they have a lot of people entering each church at the same time it will be difficult.

This seems to be a family and not a community, they are very friendly to each other but not to outsiders.

This pastor needs to somehow ignite a spark in his congregation and help them understand that it is exciting to be a Christian and serve the Lord in everything that they do.

May the Lord Bless your ministry

Ken Johnson

August 13, 2006

I have reached the century mark. 100 different churches visited since February 23, 2003. I continue to have feelings of excitement, depression, joy, learning, teaching, and many other feelings that happen when I visit churches with different pastors, different worship leaders and different styles of worship. Everything I have seen is valid worship but maybe not valid in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Maybe the worship was valid in the 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's but not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I trust that these first 100 have been enlightening to everyone who has read them and that they have helped you evaluate your worship and do a better job.

I know that there are people who think worship should stay the way it has been for the last few decades, but people and the culture are changing and worship will have to keep up with the rest of the culture. If worship was supposed to stay the same then we would still be worshipping the way they did 2000 years ago. Worship has changed as the people and the culture have changed and I'm afraid that it will continue to do just that. Granted the culture is changing faster today than it ever has and there is nothing we can do about it except study it and change when the need arises. Our one and only purpose as Christians today is to bring people to Christ—not feeding the hungry and housing the poor—but winning people for Christ. It's amazing that when we concentrate on spreading the Good News and winning people for Christ how God takes care of all of those other things.

Well, let's get down to number 100. This church was probably one of the best in the first 100 although they weren't perfect. My visit just happened to be on the last Sunday before they move into their new building. They have worshipped in a converted warehouse for a number of years (I'm not sure how many) and they bought 53 acres and just finished the new building, and next Sunday is the first time there. I can't wait to see the inside of the building because one end of the building is built like an ark—maybe Noah's?

I actually looked at their website and got the address of the new building and went their first. As I drove up in front of the building the first thing I noticed was that there weren't any cars—it was a ghost town—so I had to go back and look at the sign. The sign said “Future home of ... we currently meet at ...” and their old address. Uh oh, I have no idea where that is. Fortunately there was gentleman walking a child who did know. Thank you Lord. I made it to church five minutes before the service began and was warmly welcomed in the parking lot, by two people at the front door and at the sanctuary door.

I went in and sat down in my suit, boy was my suit out of place. Fortunately a gentleman immediately came to greet me. I found out later that it was the pastor. He asked my name and even remembered it when he greeted me at the door as I left. I love it when the pastor is around greeting people at the beginning of the service. In larger churches this may be the only time that the pastor is able to make contact with many people in the congregation.

The service began a couple of minutes after the hour when the Praise Team entered. The Praise Team consisted of two guys (acoustic guitar-vocal and percussion) and one lady (vocal)—Peter, Paul and Mary at their best. The pastor said that they were missing three fourths of their team—not sure why. He also said that the sound system was not the regular system because they had taken the other system to the new church. That's interesting, even a temporary sound system sounded better than many church systems that have been around for years. One complaint I had was with the slides of the words of the songs—they were always late.

The church looks like it attracts mainly people in their late 20's to the early 40's and today's music would indicate that. The music was very well done, but their sound would

appeal to a very narrow age group of people. They did have a variety of ages of people in the congregation but the numbers below 28 and above 43 were very few.

We began with about 30 minutes of music then did offertory and announcements which flowed nicely into the message. The message was the fourth in a series about peace and the pastor made it good for us guests by tying what his message this week with what he had already talked about in the first three weeks. He is an excellent presenter getting the people vocally involved answering questions, reading scripture, etc. and he also used the platform and the sanctuary very well.

The pastor gave people a chance to make a commitment to Christ at the end of the service and had a group of counselors at the front of the sanctuary to pray with people, and he immediately went to the lobby to shake hands and greet people as they left. This pastor was a ball of fire and even said that when he was worn out worship renewed his spirit and energy. I can tell you that this service certainly did lift me up. What exciting worship.

After worship I went to the guest table and asked for a guest pack and they had a nice bag of gifts which included a bag of Knott's Berry Farm Premium Raspberry Shortbread cookies—you sold me. Besides that the pack had a brochure about the church, a CD of a service, a copy of Our Daily Bread, a book called The Book of Hope, and a pen with the name of the church, the phone number and web site. The guest table had a number of well trained people—with smiles—behind it ready to answer questions.

In truth this pastor and worship is probably a little more right of center than many evangelical churches but not too far right. They did talk about healing which is what Jesus talked about and did, but too many of the people to the left of center that would not be comfortable.

One can see why this church is growing and moving to a new building—they are preaching and teaching the Word, bringing people to the Lord and sending them out to minister. Oh, and by the way, the majority of the people had their Bibles.

May the Lord truly bless your ministry.

Ken Johnson

**We will be happy to send you a list of all of the churches that were visited. Just send an email to: [info@thekenjohnsongroup.com](mailto:info@thekenjohnsongroup.com)**

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