2002

Making connections: A Study and application of Christian hospitality

Dennis Murphy

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Thesis/Dissertation Collections at RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.
Name: Dennis B. Murphy SS# Date: 08-08-02

Title of Research: Making Connections: A Study and Application of Christian Hospitality

Specific Recommendations: (use other side if necessary)

Thesis Committee: (1) Dr. James Jacobs, Jr. (Chairperson)
(2)
OR (3)

Faculty Advisor:

Number of Credits Approved: 2

Date: Committee Chairperson’s Signature

Date: Committee Signature

Note: This form will not be signed by the Department Chairperson until all corrections, as suggested in the specific recommendations (above) are completed.

cc: Department Student Record File – Original
M.S. Service Management
Statement Granting or Denying Permission to Reproduce Thesis/Graduate Project

The Author of a thesis or project should complete one of the following statements and include this statement as the page following the title page.

Title of Thesis/project: Making Connection: A Study and Application of Christian Hospitality

I, _______Dennis B. Murphy______, (grant, deny) permission to the Wallace Memorial Library of R.I.T., to reproduce the document titled above in whole or part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

OR

I, ________________________, prefer to be contacted each time a request for reproduction is made. I can be reached at the following address:

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Date ______8/8/02____ Signature ___________________________________________
MAKING CONNECTIONS: A STUDY AND APPLICATION OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

Making Connections:
A Study and Application of Christian Hospitality
Dennis B. Murphy
Rochester Institute of Technology
Abstract
Dewitt Community Church (DCC) and other Christian Churches were examined in the attempt to create a program of hospitality that was not present at DCC. There was a shift in research due to the lack of a similar model elsewhere. Studying the leadership and membership at DCC as well as trying new ideas became the basis for the study. The importance of people spending time together and serving side by side is established. Christian Hospitality is defined and added to secular restaurant management wisdom to create a Hospitality Ministry at DCC. This included a weekly brunch that was new in that the preparation, serving and clean up were intended to be done by a changing cross section of those who attend rather than a small committee serving the crowd. The brunch evolved into a successful gathering of people who otherwise wouldn't have connected. Added to this experiment were several other attempts at fellowship, a key component of Christian Hospitality. These other new events included catering wedding and funeral receptions at the church, a weekly men’s breakfast, a weekly small group meeting, a women’s ministry, a family concert and a Vacation Bible School (VBS). The findings of this research are often surprising but support the position that the new hospitality adds to the experience of those attending DCC. The implication is present that this type of hospitality lends itself to many types of personal interactions.
Making Connections

**Setting The Stage**

From a business standpoint, Dewitt Community Church is extremely successful. It is not all that common for a church to be out of debt, to have a large congregation as well as a large facility complete with most modern amenities. Dewitt Community Church has all of these qualities and more. Attached to the actual church is essentially a twelve-classroom elementary school complete with two kitchens, 20 bathrooms (2 with showers), a stage and full gymnasium with basketball court making a total of 44,000 square feet of building space. DCC boasts great financial resources as well which afford improvements such as the recent addition of air conditioning in the 500+ seat sanctuary. Additionally, DCC has a full staff of paid workers for everything from buildings and grounds to choir section leaders. It appears as if DCC is an ideal “Christian church for all people” as their printed material boasts.
Christians measure success differently than the secular world. “The ‘non-profit’ institution neither supplies goods or services nor controls. Its ‘product’ is neither a pair of shoes nor an effective regulation. Its product is a changed human being. The non-profit institutions are human-change agents.” (Drucker, 1990) Of the ever increasing 1,700 members of DCC, only a combined total averaging 700 attend the 3 services on any given weekend. Summers slow down and Easter and Christmas are standing room only. The observation is easily made that many attendees are not members and many members are not attending. So, while the money keeps coming in and attendance slowly increases over time, the question becomes, are there missed opportunities to keep people who come while attracting new people? As Rick Warren indicates, “...the key issue for churches in the twenty-first Century will be church health, not church growth...”

I believe, and my research will show that the answer lies within the interactions between the people who come to DCC for worship service. Prior to this research, 15 minutes after the worship services were over, the building was completely empty. People were very reluctant to
Making Connections

volunteer in any capacity. The committee-based administrative structure of the church was struggling to attract new members. There was a general display of detachment among most church-goers with many people walking by one another without even making eye-contact. There were few opportunities for fellowship. Volunteer needs were rarely, if ever met.

It is the trend in America for people to not "put down roots." People move further and more often than ever before. Long gone is the old time community made up of large families who help each other through every step of life. Now, families are broken by divorce, death & disease at an alarming rate. Jobs are not for a lifetime, retirement plans often crumble or don’t exist. People are trying to survive in a world of modern conveniences that bring with them hurried chaos, stress and isolation. Long ago, people faced their needs together. Women came together with great regularity to share their work loads of baking, washing, sewing and raising children. Men worked together to get their large tasks done such as building a barn. And families came together with other families at church for social and spiritual gatherings of all kinds.
Now, with washing machines, bread machines, cell phones, computers and contractors, there is little immediate need for coming together. In this day and age, is it an impossibility to expect people to have time to come together to face life with the support of their church family?

How could I most effectively meet this need for increased interaction? Peter Drucker gives insight to the dilemma; "Look outside at the opportunities, the needs. Where can we, with the limited resources we have-and I don't just mean people and money, but also competence-really make a difference, really set a new standard? One sets the standard by doing something and doing it well. You create a new dimension of performance." After much discussion with the Senior Minister, Ted Taylor, it was decided that the most likely effective, widespread strategy would be to begin a weekly brunch following the 2nd service. The DCC Hospitality Ministry (HM) was approved and implemented as the main vehicle for accomplishing most of the goals set for my research.

The Hospitality Ministry intended to use a blend of Christian hospitality and secular food service to bring
Making Connections

people together; to make connections. Further investigation and thought revealed other smaller opportunities as well, which will also be discussed.
DRAWING THE PLANS

What is hospitality and why is it an essential part of the Christian experience? Is Christian hospitality any different from secular hospitality? As Christians we are commanded to “practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13). Altogether, there are 75 references to hospitality in the Bible (Anderson, 1996). The word hospitality is from the Greek philoxenos; derived from Philos meaning to act as a friend and Philonexia meaning to entertain strangers (Strong, 1996). The Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary says that hospitality is being “kind or attentive to guests or strangers; receptive.” The Webster’s New World Dictionary defines hospitality as being “friendly or solicitous toward guests, new arrivals, etc.” When asked to describe the most hospitable person they know, people light up and go into great detail about someone dear; perhaps a grandmother, a neighbor or friend. These details are the essence of hospitality. It is worth noting that Christian or not, hospitality is not about being served from silver with white gloves. No, hospitality is not about the level of expense… nor is it about the level of service. It is about the level of caring and the sincerity of the invitation.
Imagine being invited to some friend’s home for dinner. When you arrive, there is wonderfully relaxing music playing softly in the background, a fire crackling in the fireplace, wine and cheese waiting for you in the living room. Later, after a delicious home-cooked dinner is cleared, you return to the inviting living room where you enjoy fresh from the oven, homemade apple pie ala mode with coffee. There is a mixture of both deep and light-hearted conversation before the dying embers of the fire remind you of the hour. You go to leave and as your dear friend hands you your coat, you reach into your pocket and pull out your wallet asking, “How much do I owe you?” Of course, your friend is hurt and appalled. Your friend’s efforts had nothing to do with money. His efforts were sincere and as enjoyable for him as for you.

There is a difference between inviting people to your home and inviting people to your bed & breakfast. That difference is the difference between a capitalistic approach to service and true, personal hospitality. The service industry tries to simulate the emotions of personal hospitality. The current demand for such service proves that they are filling a need. But in a Christian church,
it is not Biblically based to approach hospitality with this same model.

Instead, The Bible calls Christians to "practice hospitality" which includes hospitality towards fellow Christians, widows, the poor, children and even enemies. The command to be hospitable to our enemies goes as far as providing a feast (2 Kings 6:21-23). This implies celebration and extravagance. In many Christian churches today, the term "hospitality" is used for refreshments only: coffee and cookies. The Bible's direction points to a deeper commitment.

My family and I went to a pipe-organ lecture-demonstration at a local church. We were greeted at the door by several friendly people who seemed to greatly anticipate our arrival. Although the event had been publicized, we were the only people (4) in attendance. But we never saw an ounce of disappointment in their faces, words or actions. We were able to go in the room which houses the organ pipes and the talented musical director gave us quite a show. It felt like a private performance for royalty. There were no refreshments but the hospitality was some of the best I've experienced.
Making Connections

At another church, we attended a concert in a Christian coffeehouse. There was an admission price and the refreshments were homemade and reasonably priced. At the end of an excellent show, we (the concert-goers) were asked to put the tables and chairs away. It gave everyone a chance to be needed, to work along side and visit with others in the process.

At yet another church, any refreshments are provided by the people who come to each event. People sign up in advance to bring in some treat for others. The people there are also asked to put their own chairs away at the end of any event. At one of the larger, more popular evangelical Christian churches in our area, there is a team of volunteers who serve coffee and desserts to people as they leave the worship services.

DCC has had its own form of hospitality for years and years in the form of a “coffee hour” which is better titled, “coffee minutes” following the 2nd service in the parlor. Tracking the attendance of the coffee hour showed that the same group of 15 to 20 adults (no children have come) spend a few minutes visiting over a quick cup of coffee. The entire process is set up, served, consumed and
Making Connections

cleaned up within 15 minutes. Aside from the "coffee minutes" there were simple brunches put on by the 9 person Fellowship Committee about twice a year. These were full service events with roughly the same group of 80 people in attendance each time. People sat with the small group they already knew and there were no new connections made. In churches with strong connections, I found that essential to the Christian life is the sense of belonging. This belonging comes from ownership and interaction. In my hospitality ministry, I would need to develop a layer of involvement that would give people that sense of ownership and not just the interaction alone.
CHALLENGES & BENEFITS

To serve as encouragement and support, my wife and I started a small group which meets once a week. It was within these meetings with another DCC family who shared our vision that we developed a survey to be administered to the congregation that would establish a need. Rev. Taylor would not permit such a survey. This made it more difficult to assess our effectiveness. However, the research would have been brought to a complete and abrupt halt if I didn’t have the backing of Rev. Taylor. I would have to work within the boundaries set by Rev. Taylor who had been in charge at DCC for 20 years. This is one of the challenges of implementing any program at an older, established church. It would be easier to conduct such research in conjunction with a new Senior Minister. Nonetheless, I forged ahead with the plan knowing that I would need to find feedback in other ways.

I had seen in so many churches that the people volunteering kept growth, strength and vitality in a church. But at DCC, people were used to having the paid staff handle everything. It appeared, by their lack of involvement, that people were not looking for the
Making Connections

connections that I suspected were needed to improve the experience at DCC. Without an initial survey to give me concrete information one way or the other, I could only rely on what I had seen in other churches. So, the small group of 3 people who were joining me in my ministry and I put into place a signup sheet for volunteers to help each week at the brunches. Ultimately, we found that nobody would sign up. Interestingly, we always had plenty of help. During the course of the 14 weeks of the brunches, we discovered that the people of DCC are willing to pitch in and love to help and interact. They do not, however, commit to any such involvement ahead of time.

Another challenge before me was the issue of how to handle the finances of the brunches. Every other venue at DCC had either tickets or a set admission fee. Again, without our original survey to give us something to go on, the HM decided that it was possible that the people of DCC were reluctant to get involved because of the appearance of the lack of a need coupled with too much structure (committees, tickets, advance sign-ups, etc). Rev. Taylor wanted the HM to perform outside of the committee system and supported it financially by giving me $500 as “seed
Making Connections

money." In an experimental (and totally new to DCC) effort to at least break even, the pricing structure of the brunches was set at a "suggested donation" of $3.50 for a full meal and $1.50 for a "snickersnack" to be placed in a basket on the center of any table. We never defined what constituted a full meal or a snickersnack. Instead we included some encouraging quotes about hospitality and its beneficial effects along with a statement about our financial structure; "This ministry is funded 100% by your financial contributions and is only possible through your prayers, time, talents & feedback." All told, the brunches reaped a profit of $720 after spending $400 on facility improvements. Soup warmers, soup spoons, and cutting boards were purchased to support future hospitality.

Comment cards were placed on each table along with some cards that had conversation-starter questions on them. The total number of tables was always kept at a minimum so that people were forced to sit wherever there was room. We asked everyone to serve themselves and clear their own settings. DCC is a church with a large number of elderly people. Many of these elderly folks attended the brunches and some even cleaned up extensively. But for the most
Making Connections

part, they are unable to help. So, we made it clear that it helps the HM to have people come and eat and smile and chat with someone they don’t know.

The Hospitality Ministry and its brunches were announced from the pulpit each week for the first 4 weeks. For the first 10 weeks, the menu was printed in the bulletin also. After that, two larger menus were strategically posted near the entrances of the church. This, along with the smell of fresh baked muffins created a lot of interest. Having 125 people descend upon a brunch all at once proved to be difficult. Some comment cards came back suggesting splitting the buffet line. From the very next (second) week on, the room was set up with two separate, duplicate lines containing the main dishes (soup, salad, pancakes, etc.) and then three others containing different drink, fruit & baked goods combinations. We were then able to feed upwards of 150 people in 10 minutes. Our coffee minutes had been transformed.

More exciting than being able to increase the speed of service was the realization that people were hanging around visiting and making new friends. A key element of the brunch that made this possible was our “kids corner” where
Making Connections

we had a TV/VCR set up with a Christian video for kids along with a table with activities for the kids to do. So, the parents were free to relax while the (10-25) kids had fun together.

The original plan was to have the teens of DCC play a large role in the brunches. We wanted a cross section of every age represented at the brunches. Since DCC youth involvement on any level drops drastically after about 4th grade, finding a way to attract them to this project requires something more than just having the brunches and asking for their involvement. The relatively new youth minister did bring a group of teens to the brunch on a couple of occasions but only as a meeting place prior to an activity. DCC teens have been asked to help in strictly janitorial tasks in the past. Teens like to feel that they contribute in a greater way than doing dishes. I feel that the issue of teen detachment is one that requires a dual effort in the future on the part of the HM and the youth minister.

We would often be at the brunches for 2 hours cleaning up and having fun with a varied group of people. There were kids as young as 7 and 10 scrubbing and drying dishes
Making Connections

in the kitchen. Tables and chairs were put away, floors swept and all the while, people were talking. One gentleman who is an inventor took a piece from a DCC chair rack home and adapted it so that chairs could be stacked in such a way that more could fit and nobody would need to bend over to stack them.

A quiet couple came every single Saturday afternoon to set up the 33 tables and 190 chairs for the Sunday brunch. They were unable to come to the brunches but felt good about doing the setup. Nobody ever saw them work. They weren’t doing it for the accolades. This working in an unseen way points us back to a desire to serve and be needed.

The system of setting up the day before was necessary because the DCC gym where the brunches took place are rented out each and every Saturday to some basketball leagues from 8am-3:30pm. Other various groups use the gym throughout each week. This is one of the frustrations of us using our own church building. It would’ve been infinitely easier to set it all up once and only take it down if there was some special event requiring us to do so. Once again, since the church has been set up this way for
years, it was unlikely at this time that DCC would stop renting out the rooms for non-church functions. Most churches do not open up their facilities for community use. It was becoming clear that our church was somewhat unusual and was requiring some adjustments to the original plans.

Along with the previously mentioned "kids corner" at the weekly brunches, there were some other elements that have either been a blessing to the brunch or a hindrance. We had set up an "information station" in the gym during all brunches as a vehicle to communicate various church related events and needs to the people attending the brunches. I'm not convinced that everyone knew about the station. Therefore, next fall, we will have a microphone available to make announcements to ensure that everyone at least knows about the importance or interest value of items on that bulletin board.

There are 3 services each weekend at DCC. Saturday night at 5:30pm, Sunday morning at 9:00am and 10:45am. Generally speaking, people attend the same service week in and week out. The brunches always followed the 10:45am service. There is not an opportunity to have any brunch for the 9:00am service as the church needs people to leave
in order to accommodate the parking needs of the 2nd service. On the rare occasion that there is something following the early Sunday service, parking is a real problem. The HM did host an hors d’oeuvre reception one evening following the Saturday evening service but that was not a long-term solution to bring those people together. It was a purely catered event with no involvement from the congregation.

I eventually was able to do a survey of questions pertaining to the brunch only. (Interestingly, not a single Saturday evening attendee filled out this survey.) The feedback was unanimous. The people who attend the 10:45 service also attend many or all of the brunches and love them. Those people attending the earlier service would love to attend a brunch or similar venue but none has been made available. I am considering putting out a continental breakfast preceding the 9:00am service but it remains to be seen if people would attend with any regularity. At the present time, the HM is small enough that there isn’t enough in the way of volunteers to put on a regular event for the Saturday evening folks.
Making Connections

Initially, the setup and cleanup for the brunches were very labor intensive, with full table settings and the church’s china plate-ware. I eliminated the full settings and opted for self-serve utensils and disposable plate-ware at the end of each line of food. This made the setup and cleanup quicker. Leftover food was divided and sent home with those people who helped with the big cleanup effort and often we were able to drop off a large box of leftovers for a family of 6 that was in need.

Despite the lack of insight as to how many we could expect each week, a trend did develop. On the average, we had 125 people come to the brunches. While many faces were seen there each week, there was always a varied assortment of people. There were several times that people had extended family and friends join them at the brunch, often to celebrate a baptism, birthday or holiday. The abundance of food (leftovers) and the donation being just a suggestion did not prove to be a problem as we were able to make a profit most of the brunch season and ended profitably. Needing only enough to pay for the food cost was something very foreign to me from my 25 years of previous restaurant experience.
STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION

The small group meetings previously mentioned were proving to be a great place to test ideas, get suggestions, get/give support and keep each other on track with our goals. Shortly after this small group was established, a second group began meeting. Each Wednesday morning at 6am, a group of (currently 4) men from DCC meet for breakfast and fellowship.

It began with 2 of us deciding to meet in local restaurants and inviting a third. Soon we discovered that restaurants didn’t give us the food quality or time that we were looking for. We shifted our meeting place to the kitchen in the church. I invited a 4th gentleman who shared our vision and we now meet without fail. The responsibility for preparation of each meal is rotated. We are able to sit and chat for 2 hours a week. This men’s breakfast group crosses generations with 4 men of different ages and stages of life. We have a grandfather, a dad whose kids are out of the house and in college and two dads whose kids are still elementary school age.
Making Connections

This crossing over social boundaries is key to a successful level of overall interaction, acceptance and connection. Isolation is not the answer to personal problems. Look at the need for support groups. There are support groups for recovering alcoholics, single parents, every disease known to mankind, moms of preschoolers, homeschooling families, and more. The abundance of these support groups indicates their effectiveness. "When shared with a group, joys are multiplied and sorrows are divided" (Adams, 1977).

On the evening of Good Friday, there was a Requiem performance by our church choir and half of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra. As I approached the building over a half an hour before the performance, I noticed a couple whose car had broken down on the street just beside the church parking lot. After a while a tow truck arrived. I walked over and introduced myself to see if there was any way to help them. The couple was 60 miles away from home. I invited them to the concert and told them that we'd find someone to give them a ride home afterwards. Their only other option was to find lodging or to call a cab. They
Making Connections

stayed for the performance and a choir member gave them a ride home. As they left the church, they remarked that this had been "one of the nicest evenings we've ever had." Hospitality, treating strangers as if they were friends.

As a parallel part of my research, I started with the HM to attempt to cross committee lines and make more involved and stronger bonds. The Hospitality Ministry does what the Fellowship Committee could if it didn't have to have meetings and follow a lengthy set of constitutional requirements. The overlapping activities could have caused friction. It was a goal from the onset to build bridges, not build walls. Previously, DCC committees (of which there are 11) never worked together on anything. If something got done, it was by the small groups of committee members. A common answer to my questions about why something was done a certain way was, "Well, (Pause) because that's what we've ALWAYS done!" I would need to be careful to cross lines in a positive way and not to cross lines causing crossfire.

Because of the lack of regulation and formality, the HM was able to jump in the middle of many different committee projects with great enthusiasm and support for
Making Connections

those committees. It was clear from the beginning that I would need to work closely and yet keep enough distance between the HM and any committee to avoid the rigidity that they endured.

The DCC Friendship Ministry is a part of the Women's Association and follows the committee system. This ministry provides visits to the housebound/infirmed and offers coffee and dessert receptions following funerals and memorial services for church members.

For one memorial service in particular for a DCC couple whose 30 year old daughter had died suddenly, the bereaved family wanted more than cookies for their guests. The HM reception that followed helped the family and friends as well as those serving. With the emotions still so raw and close to the surface, people who had maybe only smiled at one another in the hall on Sunday mornings were hugging long and sincere hugs of intense sympathy and support. That built ties that won't be easily broken. It is hard to imagine a setting besides a shared meal capable of putting people at ease under such difficult circumstances. The food became a vehicle for some heartfelt visiting together. You could sense the mood change from
grief to fellowship and then even to celebration. The reception was a simple buffet, which created the pockets of time needed for different groups of guests to spend time together sharing grief and comfort. If the group had relocated to a facility other than the church, the simple act of driving there would have provided enough time to cover those emotions and the depth of healing wouldn’t have happened. Time and time again, this was the experience after such devastation within the DCC family.

Rev. Taylor and I decided to organize a volunteer base for various either small or one-time projects around the church. Again, the motive was to keep it very light in commitment. There were to be no meetings. We printed and distributed as an insert in the weekly bulletin (reaching 500+ people) a request for people to become a "worker bee." The 70 family response was tremendous for a church where it has traditionally been difficult to get people to volunteer. I sent out a follow-up questionnaire to find out what specific tasks each "worker bee" would be interested in helping with. The result was a number of solid volunteers in a variety of areas. The first use of this new group came in May with a cleanup of the cemetery
Making Connections

adjacent to the Church property. Out of the 21 worker bees contacted, 12 were available and attended. I had only spoken directly with three. The others responded to my message left on their answering machines. Just a week ago we had a painting party at one of the homes owned by the church in preparation for a new tenant. There are groups ready at any given point to do anything from clean chandeliers to plant bulbs or do computer work. This has been very successful. I believe we will put a similar request out periodically in the future to keep a strong volunteer base.

On the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend, a traditionally slow day at DCC, we had over 100 people show up for a historical tour of the cemetery and reception coupled with Sunday School (grades K-6) group project. Everyone ate, toured and lingered. Later that night, DCC hosted an evening concert of Adirondack folksingers with a dessert reception. Over 160 people attended. Both events that day are examples of cooperation between committees. The Cemetery Committee, Hospitality Ministry and the Christian Education Committee worked together on the cemetery
Making Connections

project. The Summer Music Series, Hospitality Ministry and the Fellowship Committee worked together for the concert. The Fellowship Committee put up half of the money for the performance. This was unprecedented.

The grand finale of the brunch season was the Confirmation brunch on 6/2/02. This was another successful event sponsored by the HM and the Christian Education Committee. It was actually two brunches with one following each of the two Sunday services. The brunch following the 1st service was for the 1st class of confirmation kids and their families totaling 100. The normal weekly brunch that followed the 2nd service included kids and their families from the 2nd confirmation class for another 160 people. Notable differences about this brunch from previous weeks included the high level of participation by the teens and their families setting up and decorating as well as cleaning up between brunches. In the past, the Christian Education Department put out punch and cookies for the confirmation class kids and their families. The families brought in some homemade muffins and were very appreciative of the more elaborate celebration.
Making Connections

Other events and projects that the HM either initiated outright or supported vigorously included staff meetings/luncheons, larger quarterly staff meetings/luncheons, staff retirement luncheons, Spaghetti Dinner/Theatre Production (HM, Fellowship Committee & DCC Players), The Sunday School Picnic (HM & Christian Education Committee), and the Board of Trustee quarterly dinner/meetings. These events gave various groupings of DCC people time together to work, visit and eat side by side. Once again, committee members found themselves on the same team as other people from other committees working toward a common goal.

Another layer that I built into the HM was the element of surprise. We tried to exceed expectations whenever possible. The outstanding food quality and variation at the brunches was a dramatic and well-received surprise. During a play that was performed at DCC I put ice water in the actresses dressing rooms. Prior to the Adirondack Folksingers performance I put a tray of food for them in their dressing room. This included sandwiches, fresh fruit, cookies and drinks. After that same concert, the HM put out 14 homemade pies along with various other desserts
and punch. The crowd was very pleasantly surprised when they saw the slices of fresh pie, free of charge, still warm from the oven as they came out after the show.

I also used the brunch survey that was conducted towards the end of the brunch season as a vehicle to surprise people. One of the questions was open-ended asking about ways to improve the brunch. Someone who had attended all of the brunches indicated that they wish that there was fresh pineapple more often. Every Sunday after that, there was fresh pineapple and plenty of it.

DCC was privileged to have the American Boy Choir perform in April. This busload of 30 boys came into town along with their 6 guardians. Families from DCC hosted each of the boys overnight. The HM and the host families put on a dinner at the church the evening before the performance. When the host-families brought the kids back the next morning to board their bus, the HM presented the boys with goody bags which included crackers, cookies, fruit and juice, a DCC pencil, a Syracuse Symphony Orchestra pen and a postcard of the church. The goody bag was unexpected and well received. The element of surprise is a fun aspect of the hospitality that we are striving
Making Connections

for. It makes it as much fun for those serving as it is for the recipient.

A very successful idea that was implemented as a part of our HM brunch was the use of recipes from people within our church. Back in 1996 the Women’s Association Committee published a cookbook filled with recipes from those who attend our church. The cookbooks were sold as a fundraiser and most people I spoke with said that they didn’t ever use the books. The recipes were collecting dust in homes everywhere. We tried to use at least one recipe from that cookbook each week. The conversations that were started because of the addition of people's recipes were numerous. People sought out those whose recipe we used. There is now some talk of pulling out those extra copies of the cookbook for further distribution. Mother’s Day proved to be great fun as some of our church moms were surprised that we used their recipes.

A new women’s group was started as part of my research. DCC has a Women’s Association (WA) which is a part of the strictly regulated and highly formal committee structure of the church. There are several committees within the Women’s Association. Although all of my
Making Connections

research indicated that strong and growing women’s ministries were not much like our Women’s Association, I was faced with the reality of our situation. If this new venture was pitted against the Women’s Association, it would cause division and bitterness. That is the polar opposite of the goal. So, my wife, Maureen began to attend the Women’s Association monthly meetings. Although she hadn’t been nominated to the committee, she was warmly received because of her youth, enthusiasm and willingness to get involved. She invited another woman named Kathy who is also substantially younger than the elderly ladies of the WA. After only a couple of meetings, the WA asked Maureen and Kathy to put together something to bring in more young women. This was the opening that these two ladies were looking for. “Women’s Connections” (WC) was born. They had a Women’s Connections brunch on a Saturday morning that was well attended by 65 women including a good mix of all ages. That mix was part of the goal. Then they planned a dessert and coffee with a speaker in the church parlor on a Sunday evening that was also well attended by a mostly younger crowd of ladies. Of the 24 women in attendance at the dessert & coffee, 17 women signed up to
Making Connections

be on the email or phone list for future events. Brochures were printed up to promote Women’s Connections and it is now a growing group within the church without conflict. The premise is that they exist alongside the Women’s Association. The WC group is not bound by any of the WA constitution. This gives them the flexibility to meet the changing needs of the women in the church. Very few of the faces that appear at the Women’s Connections events would ever even consider attending the Women’s Association Meetings. These women have said that they aren’t comfortable making long term commitments or attending meetings which is consistent with my research.

The Women’s Association has two luncheons a year. These are somewhat formal affairs with fancy table clothes and the church china. Although the group in attendance is an aged group, both events provide great fellowship. The key to success and major additional fellowship opportunity was the large number of men who volunteered to serve the meals to the ladies. Most, if not all, were husbands of the ladies being served. In exchange for praise and a plate of what the women were eating, these 12-14 men donned
the newly purchased, royal blue DCC logo aprons and waited hand and foot on the ladies. These luncheons average the same 85-110 guests. Working with the men at the first luncheon gave them the experience they needed to successfully serve all of the women their entrée in less than five minutes at the second luncheon.
SUCCESS COMES WITH CONNECTIONS

It became clear that where people using the DCC building had a connection to it (member or churchgoer), there was a level of enjoyment from both the service and those served. Whereas, the groups who use the building without any connection had little respect for those serving or the property itself. I have witnessed children writing on furniture with crayons, beer bottles and trash left all over, repeated interruption of an actual church service by a group who were using the building at the same time and $1,500 worth of damage done to the outside of the building when someone backed into the concrete and hand-railing and left without telling anyone what had happened. These events reinforced my understanding that connections have widespread positive effects.
SURPRISES/CHANGED LIFES

One of the greatest parts of my research was getting to experience first hand the effects of the programs and services put into place. While I did conduct a survey with some 74 responses, the strongest evidence of connections being made and people responding to the programs are in their stories. These are stories of people who would not have "plugged in" if these programs had not been in place. This reinforces Peter Drucker’s idea that “Any organization develops people; it has no choice. It either helps them grow or it stunts them. It either forms them or it deforms them.”

Tony was an unemployed friend from my restaurant days. He is what we call “unchurched” because he doesn’t attend church anywhere. A very nice guy who lives alone and is not near any family. He heard about our brunch and began spending 15-20 hours over two to three days a week working on the brunches with me. He made all of our soups from scratch and prepared much of what we served. He began to come to work at the actual brunches as well. His name swept through the church as his soups became legendary. He eventually found a job through some church members and
Making Connections

continues to work there today. It was an opportunity for a lonely guy down on his luck to feel useful, have something interesting and wonderful to put on his resume and to be built up in his incredible kitchen skills.

Greg is a young man who used to be a line cook. He was volunteering as an usher at our 9:00 am Sunday service. Rev. Taylor mentioned the brunches to him and he was a strong part of the team from day one. He also lives alone. Although he used to meet many people while ushering at the first service, he now does that and then comes down to cook for the brunches following that up with eating at the brunches once the cooking is done. He has met many more people and has been greatly encouraged through conversations over the griddle as he embarked on his new job working for a company that builds schools and churches. On more than one occasion he has come to me to discuss something that has been going on in his life. He also had a few of us over to his apartment for dinner one night. A connection has been established.

Norris is another usher during the Sunday morning church services. He asked if he could help by using his new computer software to create a nice printout of the menu to
be posted during the week by both entrances of the church. He also began to come into the kitchen during the brunch preparations and strike up conversation. We had seen him hundreds of times but never to speak to. This was an opportunity for multiple people to have the time and the atmosphere to interact.

We had put out the request in the church bulletins that we needed donations of baked goods. Again, nobody ever "signed up" for this on our volunteer sheets but each and every week trays appeared with delicious assortments of homemade or store bought goodies. Little old ladies brought in fresh batches of their favorite cookies for our brunches. One week, a single mom and her two kids brought in 4 kinds of homemade muffins, enough to feed 100 people.

There is a unique family who sings in the choir at DCC. The Lingo family drives nearly an hour twice a week to make it to the rehearsal on Thursday and the services on Sunday and then another hour back home each time. They attended every brunch and quietly put it all away when we were done. They would just fold up chairs and tables and work steadily until it was all cleaned up. The father, Buff Lingo is the inventor/college professor who modified
Making Connections

the chair rack. It is entirely plausible that the brunch experience has benefited them as well. I often saw them sitting with someone new and sharing their gentle, great personalities with others.

There was another success story of an unusual kind as a result of the HM brunches. There is a single mom who has Multiple Sclerosis and is confined to a wheelchair. She has a teenage daughter who is handicapped and walks with a walker. They were well known by sight at our church. This family began to come to most of the brunches. The Fellowship Committee brunches were marked by people putting chairs up against the table to save seats for friends. We had asked people to sit and visit with someone they didn’t already know and it was working quite well. This afforded some much-needed interaction for this woman and her daughter. This increased interaction between the mom and other churchgoers created an added awareness and willingness to help this family get out to their van.

Someone from the Property Management Committee sat with her one Sunday and as a result of that interaction, the church’s handicapped parking drop off zone was widened and the curbs changed. There is a church member who is going
Making Connections

to go to this woman’s home and cut her hair for her. That is hospitality.
CURRENT STATUS/FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Initially, I was disturbed that I didn’t have a lot of input from other Hospitality Ministries. I couldn’t read or talk to any group who had done this before to benefit from their experiences. Most Hospitality Ministries are designed to minister to either other Christians at a retreat or to the poor, as in a soup kitchen. While their work is an excellent ministry, it gives no insight for how to teach and practice hospitality between people as they attend church. Looking back on my year of research makes me think of the book from the Bible called “Acts.” This book outlines the missionary travels and experiences of the great Apostle Paul. They didn’t call it the book of “Plans” or the book of “Research.” They called it the book of “Acts.” “Leadership is accountable for results. And Leadership always asks, Are we really faithful stewards of the talents entrusted to us? ...Leadership is doing” (Drucker, 1990). My research had to come, by in large, from my acts. Much of what I did worked, thankfully. But even what didn’t work still lead to connections and that was the purpose of my work. My work continues. Long after this project is graded and filed, I will be continuing the
Making Connections

research that I began over a year ago. What is in store for the future? Let’s take a look:

Catering will be done for people within the church. I intend to do receptions for funerals, baptisms, weddings and so on. I will not provide my services for people who have no interest in connecting. This is a family. If you are in my family, I’ll move heaven and earth if I can to provide for your needs.

The brunches are more difficult to plan for. The HM has considered switching to once a month where people can count on it always being the 2nd Sunday of each month for instance. With that switch, we may ask families to come together to plan a theme or activity (rollerblading and deli sandwiches) or we may ask committees to work together to promote their work. Another possibility is to do it each week on a much smaller scale. Since it was ultimately very demanding on my family’s schedule, we are looking for a way to lighten that load. We may go back to the original Deacon’s coffee hour idea but add some refreshments or food that requires a lot less preparation and clean up. As a possible way to entice the teens, we may ask them to run
Making Connections

egg stations in the fall. We may plan a youth talent show and I plan to attend the youth group meetings.

The small group Bible Studies that started last year with the one other family will continue this next year as well. The biggest changes to that will be for the purpose of inviting more people to join us. So, we will lock into a specific day of the week and for a specific time. Our two families would just meet whenever and wherever we could and it would often go quite late. That will not attract new people to the group. We must also address the need for childcare during the meetings. There will be a flexible but present format so that it isn’t purely social. The meetings will include activities to get us better acquainted and to offer support to each other as well as to others in the community. If we grow as we wish, we will determine the best way to split and have two small groups. This is all decided based upon researching small groups within Christian churches.

The men’s breakfast group is working on a mission statement in order to give purpose to our time together also in hopes of attracting others to our group. We hope to grow but to stay on course with our original mission.
Making Connections

We are aware of the need to not get too legalistic as that seems to keep people away. Even if it stays small, it will still benefit those of us involved because we have connected and offer tremendous support to each other with every aspect of life.

Our Vacation Bible School (VBS) is slated to happen the day after I return from RIT. This year is the first time our church has held a VBS in recorded history. The majority of the nearly 100 children coming have never attended a VBS anywhere. They are totally unfamiliar with what a VBS is. In most churches, a VBS serves to bring families to church for a week of fun, songs, crafts and snacks in the hopes that they’ll hear the message and keep coming to a Christian church. For us, once again, we are in an unusual situation. Instead of ministering to or reaching out to the unchurched, we are ministering to our own people. We are trying to get families to connect not with the church but with each other in the context of the church. We have strayed from most VBS formats to include two different events that invite the entire family and any other churchgoer to join us in some all out fun. The VBS
week will be 5 days of 3 hours per day for the kids. Then we will wrap it up with a big outdoor family party on Friday night and a chance for the kids to bring their families back to hear them sing songs they’ve learned and see a multi-media presentation of what they spent their week doing followed by an ice-cream social. This is another example of committees working together. The Fellowship Committee, Hospitality Ministry and the Christian Education Committee are all working very closely to make this large series of events a huge success.

In a church were it is difficult to get people to commit to anything in advance, we have 40 volunteers for that week of VBS and countless people who have brought in craft items, prepared stage props, decorations and crafts. My wife, who is directing the VBS has had some elderly people volunteer to be greeters for the kids and their parents and others who have slipped her cash to spend on the supplies. One church member asked what we were having the most trouble getting as far as craft materials were concerned. She told him that she was having trouble coming up with 30 unusually large peanutbutter jars. He contacted a plastic manufacturer and ordered a case of 30 new, never-
Making Connections

been-used jars and lids that were the exact large size that she needed. There was no need to soak labels off and scramble to find enough of the right size. She had also mentioned to him that she was looking for small fishing lures that she would take the hooks out of to use for a craft. He searched and found a place that makes small lures without the hooks as keychains. A case of those lures was in her hands within a week.

A couple who teach theatre at nearby Lemoyne College brought their entire class of about 20 graduate students to make the stage props for the daily VBS skits. One student stayed for hours after the class had ended and her classmates had gone home. She has no association to DCC but was very enthusiastic and wanted a tour of the facility. In the 13 years that I’ve attended DCC, I’ve never seen such excitement. There is a flurry of activity each and every Sunday after the service as people come to the VBS table to see what the updated list of needed craft materials is.

All enthusiasm aside, decisions need to be made this year for next year’s VBS. The entire process starts in January and goes to August. It has already been decided
Making Connections

that there will most likely be a Women’s Bible Study for moms during the VBS so that they can connect with other moms and share experiences and learn what the Bible has to say to mothers and wives.

The future of the Women’s Connections group is also being decided. There is a Bible Study on Contentment slated for the Fall/winter of 2002 with 12 women already signed up to attend. There is an overnight trip to a “Women of Faith” Conference in Hartford, CT in September that several women from DCC will attend together. There are plans for an evening of women coming together to watch a video on a large screen of a popular female Christian comedian. This is a group of women looking for encouragement and the sharing of wisdom. The emphasis is on those things rather than structure and meetings and stipulations.

The HM has something totally new planned for the Fall. I believe that it will be extraordinarily well received. Twice a month, we will host a “nobody should eat alone” meal. One of the terrific resources available to DCC is a gentleman named Leah. Leah lives in one of the church properties and is a church member although he runs a local
Making Connections

restaurant and is unable to attend worship services. Part of his rental deal is that he gets the house at a reduced rate in exchange for 5 hours a week of service to the church. His strong cooking skills will enable us to feed as many as attend this prospective semi-weekly meal starting in the fall. DCC has a large number of people who live alone; single, divorced, widowed, etc. There are some handicapped members who never miss a brunch and I'm confident that they will attend. This program is not intended to turn DCC into a singles bar. This is to connect those who are serving (HM comprised of church members) with those who are otherwise alone. It is also to connect them with one another. This will be a terrific opportunity to multiply joys and divide sorrows.

Also scheduled for the Fall is a neighborhood block party that DCC will facilitate for the people who live around the church. The church will offer tables, BBQ grill, trash disposal and the gymnasium as an alternative in case of rain. The church has never before reached out to the immediate neighborhood.
CONCLUSION

"Hospitality is the way we turn a prejudiced world around one heart at a time" (Chittister, 1991). There is definitely a difference between business hospitality and Christian hospitality. While my years of restaurant experience were helpful with food quality and service, there was another level to this particular type of service that was new to me, particularly from a management standpoint. I’ve practiced hospitality at home. That can be somewhat natural for many people. But managing a restaurant that doesn’t follow restaurant norms (for profit) was unnatural to me. Working with volunteers rather than paid employees created a new set of challenges and encouragements. Never before have I seen untrained people do what so many trained people attempt to do; practice hospitality. I needed to let go of my ideas of “perfection and efficiency” to make room for the truly important.

Without results from an initial survey to establish a baseline, I needed to work on the premise that DCC was greater than the sum of its parts. So, my research was a
Making Connections

series of attempts to get the pulse of the people at DCC. The advantage for me was that I'd been a member there for over 13 years. Going into an unfamiliar church would be a more difficult task, unless the initial survey was implemented. At DCC, people don't like to fill out surveys. Out of the 750 surveys that went out to the three services in bulletins and another 250 that were placed at every place setting for two brunches, 74 were completed and returned. The results of those 74 completed surveys along with many comment cards from the brunches and plenty of unsolicited feedback tell a story of change. With up to 30% of those in attendance at the 10:45 am service (which represents 60% of the total weekly attendance) coming to the brunches, it has been very well received. People want "more of the same" and had difficulty coming up with ways to improve the brunches. Some suggested working with a theme next fall. We will do that. Most people who completed surveys at the brunches said they either had invited someone to the brunches or would in the future. Most also said that they met someone they never knew before even though most come to church each week and have for years.
Making Connections

A consistent theme throughout this project was the notion of connectedness. Whenever the hospitality event involved people with ties to DCC, there was a real sense of service. However, it was evident in all situations that Christian hospitality is not about being served as much as it is about serving. Serving one another together is the ultimate expression of love within the church family. Without these connections, the sense of family doesn’t always appear to exist.

The key to growing this hospitality ministry is providing activities, which may or may not involve food, that encourage interaction between churchgoers at DCC. Even more powerful will be events where the gap between server and served shrinks or is eliminated. Church growth, whether it is defined by attendance, donations, volunteers or fellowship will benefit from these expressions of Christian hospitality; of ownership.

Has my research and the resulting programs completely changed the face of DCC? No. But for the people who have responded to the new way of connecting, their experiences at DCC will never be the same. Those people make eye contact. Those people stop and talk about how they are
Making Connections

really doing rather than a pat “fine.” Those people are eager to get involved in something that will serve their DCC family. This is the beginning and God only knows where it will go.
REFERENCES


