

## Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

### Radical Hospitality

Frankton - 6/15/14

Scripture: Romans 15.1-2, 5-7      Welcome one another for the glory of God

Proposition: Radical hospitality shows our love for others and for God

**[SLIDE]** I need to have the ushers come forward and help me for a minute. We are starting a new series of sermons based on the Bishop Robert Schnase's book *Five Principles of Fruitful Congregations*. To remind you that we are to be fruitful, every week we're going to give you a different fruit. Today happens to be raspberries and the raspberries remind us of Radical Raspberry Hospitality. So everyone gets a raspberry. They've been washed and are ready for the eating. You don't have to wait, once you get yours. You can mow down on it or you can wait and savor it at your leisure. (Ushers to hand out raspberries.) Remember: Radical Raspberry Hospitality.

Ann Mowery began her pastorate as a small rural congregation in Missouri. The church had been having about 100 people at Sunday morning worship with somewhat of a skewed mix of ages - fewer younger folks and a whole lot more older folks made up the congregation. Seven years later, attendance reached around 150 on Sunday morning and the congregation had renovated the dining area and the youth room. The secret to their success was an active hospitality that has become contagious throughout the congregation. For instance, there was a young mother who attended a few times, but she felt self-conscious when her baby started to fuss during the worship service. Pastor Ann met with the congregational leaders and they decided they so highly valued having young people that they had to do something to ease the young mom's discomfort. To show support for the young mom, they brought a comfortable rocking chair and placed it just behind the last row of pews in the sanctuary. A funny thing happened, word got around what the church had done for the young mother and soon they had to have two more rocking chairs to accommodate more young moms who had suddenly found that congregation to be the friendliest congregation around.

Pastor Ann's congregation practices what Bishop Robert Schnase has called Radical Hospitality. In his book, Schnase outlines five specific areas that he has seen be effective in growing congregations. He believes these five practices to be imperative for a church to perform in order to be successful in its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. These five practices are what this sermon series details: **[SLIDE]** Radical Hospitality, Intentional Faith Development, Passionate Worship, **[SLIDE]** Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity.

One of the uses of the word 'radical' is to indicate something that is vastly different from the norm. Radical hospitality practices exceed expectations, go the second mile, and take welcoming the stranger to the max. I don't mean wild-eyed, out-of-control, or used car salesman. I do mean that people practicing radical hospitality are offering the absolute utmost of themselves, their creativity, their abilities and their energy to offer the gracious invitation and welcome of Christ to others. Churches that practice radical hospitality are not just friendly and courteous in welcoming strangers; they exhibit a restlessness because they realize that so many people do not have a relationship to Jesus Christ or to a church. Let me repeat: **[SLIDE]**

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Churches practice radical hospitality because so many people do not have a relationship to Jesus Christ or to a church. These churches sense a calling and a responsibility to pray, plan and work hard to invite others, to help them feel welcome and to support them in their faith journeys.

Notice why churches practice radical hospitality: because so many people do not have a relationship to Jesus Christ or to a church. Therefore, churches don't practice radical hospitality because they need other folks to fill the empty pews and put money in the collection plate so the church can pay the bills. They don't practice radical hospitality because they need more folks to fill up the committees or sing in the praise team. They don't practice radical hospitality because they fear that their church is dying. Churches practice radical hospitality because they see that so many people do not have a relationship to Jesus Christ or to a church. Churches that practice radical hospitality understand how critical it is for people to know Jesus Christ and be a part of his church. They understand that the consequences of not knowing Christ are hell-ish and eternal and they can't stand to think of someone facing those consequences.

You see, people want to know that God loves them, that they are of ultimate value to God, and that their life has significance. People want to know that they are not alone, and that when they face life's difficulties they are surrounded by a community of grace. People want to know that they do not have to figure out entirely for themselves how to cope with family tensions, self-doubts, periods of despair, economic reversal, and the temptations that hurt themselves or others. People want to know about the peace that runs deeper than just an absence of conflict. They want to know about the hope that sustains them even through the most painful periods of grief, and about the sense of belonging that blesses them and stretches them. People want to know that life is not just having something to live on but also someone to live for, that life comes not from taking for oneself, but by giving of oneself. People want to know their sustaining sense of purpose. Churches practice radical hospitality because people want to know these things, not so they can fill the empty sanctuary pews or the empty checkbook

Let's talk specifics in Madison County for just a minute. I have just said that churches practice radical hospitality because they see that so many people do not have a relationship to Jesus Christ or to a church. I want to show you some of the latest figures I have regarding church attendance in Madison County. **[SLIDE]** Approximately 37% of the people living in Madison County regularly attended worship services on Sunday or their Sabbath. That's better than the national average of 20%, but still nothing to write home about. **[SLIDE]** If we consider the greater metropolitan area of Frankton to be average, that means that about 1134 of our 1800 local residents do not attend church regularly. The harvest is ripe. If we practice radical hospitality, understanding we do it because those folks need a relationship with Jesus Christ, we can positively affect the lives of 1134 people here in Frankton.

We've talked about the word radical, now let's talk about hospitality. Christian hospitality refers to the desire to invite, welcome, receive and care for those folks who are strangers so that the strangers find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the richness of life in Christ. **[SLIDE]** Christian hospitality describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community. It's an outward focus reaching to those not yet known. It's a love that motivates church folks to be willing to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of the newcomers. Hospitality is prayer, work, habit, practice, and initiative for the purposes of Christ.

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Radical hospitality screams at us in scripture. [SLIDE] In Deuteronomy, God tells the people of Israel to welcome the stranger, the sojourner and wander because they themselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt. [10.19] [SLIDE] In Matthew, Jesus tells his listeners that he was a stranger and they welcomed him. He then told them: I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me! [SLIDE] In this morning's scripture, Paul writes that we are to *accept each other as Christ accepted us and God will be glorified.* [SLIDE] And finally, the letter of Hebrews cautions against neglecting hospitality: *Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels!* [Heb 13.2]

Just imagine what radical hospitality might look like right here in this church. How about in addition to handicapped parking spaces, there are clearly marked parking places for visitors and special parking places for families with small children. How about a staffed greeting station with greeters to answer any questions and as well as to give guests a gift from the church plus brochures about the church and its activities. How about several seats in the worship area with arms on them for seniors (and others) who might need a little extra help just getting up. How about a church that regularly honors those special people in the community with a sack lunch – volunteer fire fighters, policemen, school teachers, the library staff, city workers, or the folks who serve us at Ricker's or Harvest or Dollar General. Radical hospitality may have its origins in the church building, but it can't remain here. Radical hospitality goes beyond the confines of the church and finds its home in the streets of God's community.

But it all comes back to our asking other people. People have no reluctance telling others where they get their hair cut, who they have fix their car, where they go out to eat, who does their taxes, or what vacation spots they like best. And yet, concerning the most important relationship Christian disciples have – their relationship to God through Christ's church – they feel hesitant to speak out. They don't want to intrude or appear pushy or sound too much like a religious nut. But think of all the church means, all that relationship to God means, the perspective of faith, the understandings of life, the relationships gained, the sense of meaning and connection and contribution experienced through church. Why wouldn't we desire these things for the people we respect and love and for the neighbors and co-workers we share our lives with? We pray to God for those folks. Why not invite them to church so that they have the same kind of relationship to God that we have?

[SLIDE] The folks who invite best are folks who don't fill the invitation with oughts and shoulds or needs. They don't make people feel guilty or nag them. They pray for the right time and the words to speak. They tell about a church mission project or a special concert or dinner at the church and say, "We'd love to have you join us." On Monday, they are not afraid to say to their co-workers, "I wish you could have been at church yesterday, you wouldn't believe what that crazy pastor of ours did this time." They explain their sore back by saying, "I worked at the Day of Service last weekend. It's tough work but I feel so great when I do it." Notice there wasn't any, "You ought to come to church" or "you should come to church" or the dreaded "you need to come to church". No nagging, just enticing.

And then if the asking is done well and the church has its hospitality program where it needs to be, then the church folks have to make some changes to accommodate those who are visiting and end up staying. We have to change our attitudes and practices. We might even have to change

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the pew we set in on Sunday morning. Good intentions are not enough. Too many churches want more young people as long as they act like old people, more newcomers as long as they act like old-timers, more children as long as they are quiet as adults. We can do better. It takes practicing radical hospitality and all the redirecting of energy and resources and volunteer time that comes with this.

Little changes can have big effects, and change can happen in a hurry. People have joined churches and remained life-long members because of a personal hand-written note they received after their first visit. People have joined a church because when they first visited and their baby fussed, someone leaned forward and said, “Don’t worry. That’s the way I feel about this sermon too. But come back, they get better!” And then they offered to take the baby and walk with it so the parents could enjoy the worship without the distraction of a fussy baby. Attending to the smallest of details and practices changes the culture of the church.

Imagine if every committee or Sunday school class, every person in the men’s or women’s group, everyone who came to Bible Study or helped out during the worship agreed to prayerfully consider changing one practice this year to accommodate new folks. In fact, I challenge each of you to do just that. Change one thing you do here at church so that you can better accommodate new folks. If you don’t do this already, you might start by just going up to folks you don’t know and introducing yourself and telling them that you are glad they are here. Maybe you could make it a point to volunteer to help those who are new to find the restrooms and the nursery and invite them to coffee and Sunday school. Maybe you could even call them the following week and just to say, “Thanks for coming and I hope you found something you liked here.”

Word of mouth is still the most important form of human communication. And when people talk about congregations as places that make people feel welcome and loved, then the church thrives. The willingness to risk something new creates a buzz and a stir in the community that strengthens participation in all other ministries of the church. Personal responsibility for the task of radical hospitality falls squarely on the shoulders of each person in this room and in this building. As a church, we cannot practice radical hospitality until you, the members of our family, practice radical hospitality. We have to change our mindset from [SLIDE] “Someone should do that” to “I’ll do that.” And when we do, we will be doing exactly what Christ told us to do – loving our neighbors.

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### CHILDREN'S CHAT

Choose the most outgoing child in the group and ask him/her to pretend that you are seeing each other for the first time. Ask the child to greet you. The ideal answer would be ... "Hi my name is ... What's your name?" If you don't get an answer close to this, ask the other children in the group: "What's another way to introduce yourself to someone you don't know?" Ask the children to try to imagine that having a new child in their Sunday school class or their class at school is like a guest arriving at their home for the first time. What are things we can say to make them feel welcome? What are some things we do to make people feel welcome? Do we have anything in our homes to make people feel especially welcome? Produce a welcome mat and ask the children if they have a mat like this at their house. Ask two or three of the children to take turns standing on the mat. Ask them if they felt any different standing on the mat, rather than sitting with the group on the floor. Surely one of them will say, "The welcome mat made me feel special." And that's how we want a newcomer to our class to feel: special. Share a prayer with the children: "As Jesus always welcomes us, O God, so let us welcome others. Amen."

### MEMORIZING NOTES

Raspberries, [5P]

Ann Mowery, grew, chair,

Series, [Ps]

Radical: exceed, OTT, gracious invitation, [don't have relate to JC or CH]

Notes: fill pews fill plates fill comms fill PT dying, no relate to JC or CH, hellish

Want to know: value, loved, surrounded, how to cope, peace, live on live for

Frankton, 37%, 1134 out of 1800, harvest is ripe, positively affect,

Hospitality: desire to invite, [love for others], outward focus

Scr: [strangers] [least] [accept] [angels]

Look like here: parking, stations, seat arms, rockers, lunch, **origins in prax out**

Inviting, vacation restaurant hair car, not faith, nut, same relate with God

No oughts should needs; love to, pastor, sore, no nag

If well people stay, you old, new old, children adults, can do better

Little changes big effects, stayed because...

Imagine if: committees, YOU, challenge

Word of mouth, loved/welcomed, your shoulders, someone to I

### SERMON NOTES INSERT

*Sermon Notes, 6/15/14*

Radical Hospitality

Romans 15.1-2, 5-7

What would you have done for the young mother with the fussing baby?

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What does the word ‘radical’ mean to you?

What drives churches that practice Radical Hospitality?

Make a list of three people you have a relationship with that do not attend any church regularly.

How can we show them Radical Hospitality as a church?

What can this class do to show Radical Hospitality?

What’s one thing that you think someone should do that you can do?

Name one action you can do this week that you can take from this sermon?

## NOT USED

In the world of botany, it means: something pertaining to growing from the root. In the world of mathematics, it means: the root of a quantity.

Before we go too far, we probably need to talk about this word: radical. To some of you, the word ‘radical’ may not have too wonderful a connotation. We tend to use that word when we talk about something being on the extreme end, such as when we say, “He’s a radical right-winger” or “She’s a radical extremist.” According to the New American Heritage Dictionary, the first definition of the word radical is this: **[SLIDE]** arising from or going to a root or source,

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fundamental, basic. [SLIDE] Bishop Schnase writes that radical hospitality describes practices that are rooted in the life of Christ and radiate into the lives of others.

John Wesley, the founder of what is now United Methodism, and the early Methodists practiced hospitality in ways so radical for their day that many traditional church leaders found their activities offensive. Can you imagine: United Methodists too radical for some. [SLIDE] Wesley preached to thousands on roadsides and in open fields in order to reach coal miners, field laborers and factory workers – the underclass, the poorest of the poor. He invited them into community and nurtured in them a strong sense of belonging as he organized societies and classes for mutual accountability, support and care. Methodists founded hospitals and banks so that everyone had access to health care and the possibility of loans. Really radical hospitality.