You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

I know, the common wisdom says just the opposite (“you CAN’T teach an old dog new tricks”), but any of us who have ever been around old dogs know that’s not the case. If properly motivated (usually by a special “Scooby snack”), even old dogs learn new things.

The good news in all of this is that your “old dog” church is capable of learning new tricks, IF properly motivated. What, then, are the areas of ministry where your church needs to learn new tricks – and how will you so motivate them?

One place Jim Ozier, Congregational Development Director for the Texas Annual Conference, identifies is the abysmal watch dog mentality and barking way of behaving of too many churches when it comes to the general issue of hospitality – let alone true “biblical hospitality.” As Christians we are called to be Christ-like in our hospitality – which is a whole lot more than just being “friendly” (“a friendly church”) and nice. Consider Genesis 18 or Luke 10.

In each of these stories we see what biblical hospitality is all about – and at its core it requires self-sacrifice for a cause greater than self, the cause of Christ. Genesis 18 narrates how noble Abraham gives up his place in the shade and runs to the three visitors, sacrificing himself and his resources, giving them his place of comfort and making lunch of the prized calf all FOR THEM. And in Luke 10, Jesus tells us a story about a Samaritan who gives up his own safety and time and material possessions for the care and comfort of not just a total stranger, but someone who is consider even an enemy of his own people. Both stories display to us what true BIBLICAL hospitality is all about, which is what Jesus did on the cross – giving up self for others, which then is what is to be seen in our churches everyday – self-sacrificing hospitality. Honestly, that’s not the norm in most of our churches, is it; but friends, you can teach old dogs new tricks!

Jim Ozier shares how, in the churches he served, he would regularly take time in the worship services to teach hospitality, using a “5-10-Link Rule” card he printed up and distributed to everyone.

One side of the card reads:
5 – REFERS TO TIME
Fellowship and visiting with friends is so important in church. 5 minutes before the service starts and 5 minutes after it ends, meet someone you don’t know.

10 – REFERS TO SPACE
Even if you are with a group of friends, when someone you don’t know comes within 10 feet of you, reach out to them and invite them into your group!

LINK – REFERS TO CONNECTING
When you meet someone new, immediately link them to someone else based on some common affinity (occupation, home, state, interest, etc.)

On the other side of the card it reads:

Each of us is part of God’s tapestry of hospitality! WEAVE kindness and thoughtfulness throughout all we do as part of Christ’s Church.

W
Welcome on a personal level

E
Empathize with others; truly listen!

A
Acknowledge the concern and needs of those you meet.

V
Verify all needs have been met

E
Exit on a personal level.

What kind of difference would it make in your church’s life and ministry if you took the time in worship to teach your people new tricks (and had some FUN doing it – as part of the “treat”)? Certainly it worked for Jim Ozier, and certainly it can work for us, too, because you can teach old dogs new tricks, including the “old dog” in each of us. You just need some good snacks, like a 5-10-Link Rule card and the willingness to have some fun doing it – laughing at our present behavior and celebrating (treating) those who actually do it.

In the cause of Christ, together,

SCOTT