

A “FIVE STAR” CHURCH 4/10/99

Ever check the paper for ratings on a new film, restaurant, or upcoming show? Most popular magazines prepare annual ratings on top colleges, best cities to live in, fastest growth areas, etc. Leadership magazine recently listed seven ways to rate a church's spiritual environment in response to several metropolitan newspapers giving reports comparable to theater reviews (including ratings from one to five stars). I find it interesting that among the seven, there is no listing for scripturally patterned or Biblically sound. But, the list is revealing, nonetheless, because it gives some insight into what makes that important first impression on outsiders.

If you can overlook the primary qualification listed above that overrules all else insofar as we are concerned, please consider 7 additional ways to rate this congregation. They are all worthy of thought as we try to reach out with the good news of Christ in this community.

A Sense of God's Presence. As one part of our culture draws farther and farther away from God, another part wants to see the other side of the coin. Gentiles are still coming and asking to see Jesus. If He is present, they will see Him in our prayers, our language, our talk, and our lives. They are looking for God's presence, not just a place to hang out on Sunday mornings.

Selflessness. Visitors will decide quickly if there is a servant's heart present or if they have stumbled into a private club. Is the church here interested in new people? Do we bring them into our personal circle of friendship or sit back and just watch them attend?

Understandable Terminology. A healthy church is a church that communicates in terms that everyone can understand. Religious jargon and our “church talk” needs to be translated into everyday language that outsiders can understand.

Homogeneity. One's comfort level in a congregation is often directly proportional to their sense of “fitting in.” Have you ever heard an age group complain that there was “no one my age to be friends with?” Small steps in representing different groupings of people within the church and recognizing their needs can go a long way.

Problem Solving Style. A healthy church is not a church without problems. (That would be a dead church!) A healthy church is a church with a proper attitude and pattern to handle problems.

Accessibility. Facilities that are accessible for disabled folks are only a small part of this area. Perhaps even greater accessibility questions need to be asked. Is leadership accessible? Are the elders available as shepherds? Is the preacher available, are group leaders approachable? An approachable church would be one where it is easy to get

questions answered, meet new people, talk to church leaders, make suggestions, become a member, and discover ways to get involved in the life of a congregational family.

A Sense of Expectancy. A healthy church is a hopeful church. Not a congregation that is wishing for growth to happen, but one that is busy working with God to help it happen. They have high expectations for God's blessings in the future because they are busy in God's work presently.

Interesting rating system don't you think? Where would we stack up?

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