

### “What Year Is It?”

(With appreciation to Pastor Tim Harris of Youngers Creek for the above phrase)

Several years ago, we felt God’s leading to put our home on the market in order to relocate. We went through the steps of getting a realtor. She suggested that we prepare our home to put on the market. “No problem,” I thought, “She simply wants us to clean the home and keep the children’s toys picked up.” Well, she meant this and more. She suggested that we employ a consultant to go through our home and give us insights that a potential buyer would consider as he or she walked through home. So, we hired this consultant.

This consultant walked around our home and made a list of suggestions. She gave us insights from a “buyer’s” perspective. That is, she gave us insights of what a potential buyer would consider as he or she walked through our home.

At first, her suggestions annoyed me. I did not completely agree with her, initially. For example, she wanted us to remove all our family pictures off the wall. I thought, “But these are pictures of my beautiful children. Is she serious?!” She wanted us to rearrange some furniture. Now, I have to be honest. I despised rearranging furniture. Once the furniture is in place, then I prefer it to remain in place. I like the furniture to remain in place so when I move around in the house in the dark, then I know what to avoid and not stump my toe(s). Nevertheless, we listened and followed her suggestion. We rearranged the furniture and I never stumped my toe(s).

Then she wanted us to make some updates with some household features. Her reason? Some of our household features made the house, our home, “dated.” So, we updated from 2000 to 2011 and followed her list of suggestions because we wanted to achieve our goal. That is, we wanted to sell our home and get the best price possible; even if it meant making some minor updates. We did as she suggested so that our home would make a good first impression to any potential buyer.

Dear Reader, first impressions do matter, do they not? Let me ask you, should a first-time visitor (much like a potential buyer of our home) walk into your church, what would be that visitor’s first impression? Have you thought of how your church and ministries might look through the eyes of a first-time visitor? Our home consultant suggested we update some of our features so that our home would not look “dated.” In other words, when a first-time visitor enters your church, does this visitor enter into a church with dated features, dated hymnals, dated nursery facilities, or dated carpet? Or, has your church updated some features so as to give a great first-time impression? Yes, have you ever looked at your church through the eyes of a first-time visitor?

As I wrote above, my initial reaction to the home consultant’s suggestions was disagreement. Afterall, she was talking about my home, a sensitive subject, right? . . . . However, she was right. Sure, I had walked over the carpet stain or used some of the dated household features without ever thinking about how these items might look to a potential buyer. I had grown accustomed to these issues to the point that I did not see anything wrong with them. Yet, her insights opened my eyes. If I was serious about selling my home, then I had to look at my home through a potential buyer’s eyes.

Likewise, if we are serious about reaching the community around our church, then we must ask and answer, “What is a visitor’s first-time impression of our church? How does our

local church community view our church?” If we invited a guest in one Sunday and then later discussed with that guest how his or her first impression went, then would we be willing to have our “eyes and ears” open to the reality he or she might give?

As it was for my home and me, perhaps it is that way for the way we view our church. That is, overtime, we get used to dated features in the church. We get used to poor church signage. We get used to dated and dirty carpet. Yet, here’s the reality check. It is not about us. It is about our King. For example, we read in Colossians 3:17, “Whatever we do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” (NASB)

Ponder this with me. As you apply the above verse, then try to look at your church as a first-time visitor would this Sunday. For example, as you pull into the parking lot this Sunday, just make mental observations. Who greeted you? How many members greeted you? How were you greeted? Did anyone offer to show you which small group or Sunday School class to attend? How did the bulletin look to you? Was it cluttered? Was there a place for sermon notes? Did the order of service have a good flow? Did someone ask you to move from their seat/pew before worship? (You know, those seats that have the name plates on the side. That will be another newsletter topic, perhaps) Did the greeting time make you feel uncomfortable, as a first-time visitor would probably feel since he or she would not know anyone to greet?

I could continue, but hopefully, you are getting the point(s). This Sunday, make a mental observation and then, begin helping your church adjust as the Holy Spirit leads. After all, the church is His, not ours. Ask yourself, “What year is my church living in to first-time visitors? 1960? 1980? or 2019?”

The Association Church Strengthening Team is available to assist your church in this and other areas of ministry. I encourage you to contact the association office to schedule a meeting with them!