

## PK's Perspectives ... Be Intentional.

It has often been said of churches that they are not very friendly, welcoming places. Several years ago, Gayle and I visited a church in the city where we were vacationing — Sunday School and morning worship. Not once in the time we were on the campus of that church did any one welcome us, show us any kind of hospitality, or ask our names. I'm certain the church we visited that day is not representative of all the churches in that city, and the cold reception we received that particular day in no way dissuaded us from a desire to attend church ever again when vacationing. But I can imagine that a first time attender/seeker would not have a strong desire to return to a church - any church, even - after being summarily ignored during an entire morning spent among a gathering of Jesus followers who did not even acknowledge their presence.

The Bible encourages the community of believers to work on being a welcoming, hospitable place where people experience a fellowship that is warm and genuine. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that when we welcome a stranger, we have welcomed Christ himself! In Romans 15:7 we are told to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. Hebrews 13:2 tells to not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.

I think one of the reasons God reminds us in Scripture to be welcoming and hospitable is because our natural human tendency is to be guarded and hesitant around people we don't know. We need to be intentional about nurturing a mindset of friendliness and warmth such that when we see someone in church that we don't know or recognize, our initial response is to seek out that person and start a friendship, introduce them to other people, offer to sit with them, or maybe even invite them to share lunch!

Last Thursday, Gayle and I went on a pre-Valentine's date. Gayle had been thinking of something new and different that we could do on our date and so, following on the heels of an incredible meal at Chick-Fil-A, we ventured to the Macon Shag Club. We had a great night dancing the Carolina Shag with a group of people we had never met! All through high school the shag (as we called it) was the most popular dance and so I had some history and knowledge of "how to" shag; Gayle had never been around shag dancing very much except what I taught her during our college days. So we were excited...and a bit nervous. We didn't know exactly what to expect! Right off the bat, a couple that were also instructors greeted us and asked if we wanted them teach us the basics of the Carolina Shag. Though I had shag danced a good bit, I'd never had any kind of formal training so the instructors really helped me to understand the technical side of the dance. They were very patient with Gayle and me while we worked through the basic steps that are foundational to the dance.

The most amazing part of our night @ The Macon Shag Club was the insane number of people who sought us out to introduce themselves, ask our name, and share conversation. I mean, it wasn't a quick, perfunctory greeting - it was more like "This is who we are and we're interested in knowing about you" kinds of conversations. On the way home, Gayle and I both commented on how friendly and welcoming the club seemed to be. I even made the observation that if more churches displayed the same welcoming spirit that we experienced at The Macon Shag Club, unchurched people would probably be eager to return for a second experience. Much like we are planning to go back for another night of shag dancing! If you're interested, let me know...we'll double date. Grace & peace to FBC Cochran - the friendliest church I've ever known. Love you, PK.