



People Spot Missile: **Attraction and Incarnational Outreach**

I debated a long time regarding the title of this Missile. Should it be Attraction vs. Incarnational or Attraction and Incarnational. I decided on the more positive. There seems to be a movement in some of the circles I have been in that simply promote incarnational and ditch attractional outreach as being unacceptable.

Incarnational outreach involves the kind of things Jesus would do if he were literally here.

Surely, churches should be doing these kinds of things. My son, Jim Moss, Jr. who pastors at Eberly's Mill Church of God near Harrisburg, Pa. reported by far the largest number of requests for help in this past holiday season than they had every received. They gave out many food baskets. Jesus was concerned to feed the hungry. A group of men gathered together and cleaned out the gutters for a single mom. We are to take care of the widows. A ramp was built for a man who had become disabled and could no longer do steps so he could stay in his home. We are to care for the lame. A block party was held for the community. Many games were available. Free food was abundant. I remember the pleasant smiles I received as I announced that everything was free. Hundreds of people walked through the grounds that day. It is very simple. Remember the classical book, "In His Steps?" The kids have symbolized it with the letters, WWJD? Very simply, we as churches are being challenged to do what Jesus would do given a similar set of circumstances. That is being incarnational. We don't have a choice. We must be incarnational. But the question arises, "Can the average church walk enough people through the door simply by being incarnational?" My instincts say, "No!"

Attractional outreach is the things a church does to have people walk through the door once. Nothing works everywhere. Bulk mailing of the large postcards works in some places and not others. It has been used excessively in some communities and not others. A good response is one-half of one percent. I refer you to another Missile titled "Farming a Community." In that strategy, you mail letters on a monthly basis to 400 homes for a year. I asked a number of leaders in one church how they found their congregation. The universal answer was the yellow pages. One church regularly placed an ad in the classified section with good results. A lot of younger adults today are looking for churches on the Web. The website becomes a tool for attraction. My son again located several families through door knocking. Some have had success with Ads in the newspaper. What is the attractional tool you are using?

I know that as a church grows, tools and methods have to change. It has amazed me how many times people who have been successful in ministry turn aside from that which worked and then were disappointed when the results changed.

Dr. Horace Sills was a Conference Minister for the UCC. We often talked as we wrestled with some of the same issues. He said, “Jim, so many churches have bad reputations.” I responded, “Horace, a few of them do, but most churches have no reputation.” Except for the 1-2% of churches that I call “Churches of Choice” which are so well known that they get enough walk-ins to more than cover normal attrition. The other 98-99% have to continue to do attractational things even though they are very active incarnationally. Attraction continues to be necessary, if the church wishes to continue to grow. (Check out the Missiles on Churches of Choice and Normal Attrition.)

Each church has a program of public relations. The only question is whether it is a good one or a bad one. Public relations is the image a church projects to the community. I recently visited a church in the inner city. It had a high iron fence around the small yard which was overgrown. There was nothing about the facility implied invitation. They had a very poor program of public relations. Finally, the church was closed. Mark Lible became the pastor with assignment to begin again in Mayfair. The first thing he did was tear down the fence and put in an attractive garden with benches to sit on. Suddenly, the community became aware of the church as they walked past. Many would make use of the benches to rest. Through this and others methods they have developed a positive program of public relations. In the church, public relations is lifting up Jesus so that all people are drawn to him.

Until you have so many visitors walking through the door that you can no longer keep up with the flow, you need to do both attractational and incarnational events.

Most of the People Spot Missiles may be viewed at www.newlifeministries-nlm.org Click on People Spots.

I am now available to present “Starting a New Service”, “Churches Have Personalities”, “People Spots”, “Does Your Church Really Care About People?” and “A Christian Perspective on Leadership Skills.” jm

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