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The Phantom Pew Sitter #1

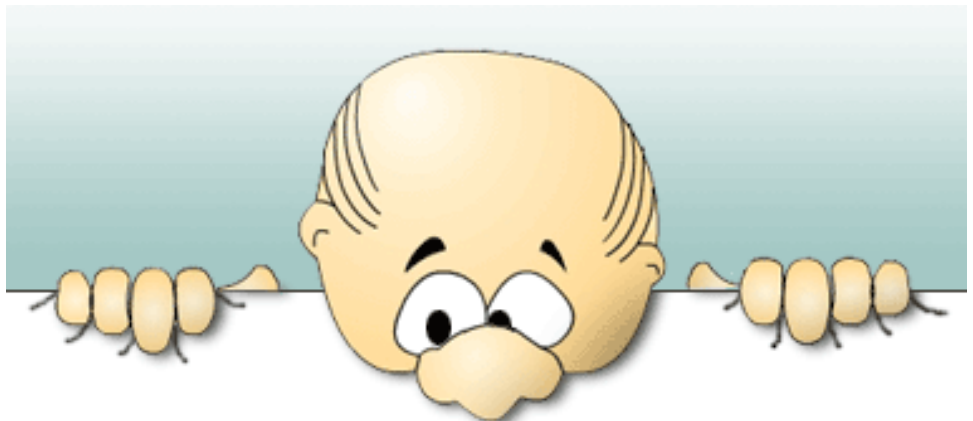
The stories of phantom visits to more than 80 different churches (without naming them of course) and telling the good and the bad of each of those visits. At the end of the report you will find the names of all of the churches visited.

**THE KEN JOHNSON
GROUP, LLC**

Church Consulting
13606 E. Bates Ave., #205
Aurora, CO 80014

www.thekenjohnsongroup.com
ken@thekenjohnsongroup.com

Phone: 303/478-6131
Fax: 303/755-4177
Home: 303/755-4177



The Phantom Pew Sitter

The Ken Johnson Group

Quite honestly, 2002 through July of 2005 has been a very interesting and exciting time in my life. Since leaving my former Director of Worship position in January of 2002 I have had the privilege of visiting more than eighty different churches, both denominational and non-denominational, from Catholic to the Vineyard and observing their worship offerings. It has been an eye opener, and has confirmed many of my concerns about the church. To be very candid in many of the churches I visited there wasn't much of anything happening in worship. They were mostly just going through the motions without much real ministry, and they were certainly not sending their people out to spread the "Good News."

The one thing I need to make clear is that I don't pull any punches—I tell it like I see it. If you want to find out more about my background and experience then go to the following web site and you will find out all of the details. www.thekenjohnsongroup.com

Generally what I saw was a sanctuary of gray haired people, which there is nothing wrong with, and pastors who obviously want to continue traditional services that have no excitement or energy, that are going through the motions of worship. There is also nothing wrong with a traditional service if it is really meaningful. When they finished the service in most of the churches it was obvious that the people weren't going out to minister to the world, they were going out to continue their normal hum-drum day to day activities which probably didn't include any ministry or, for that matter, their time probably won't even include any thought of what had just happened at church that day.

There were also those churches that were alive and vibrant with the energy of the Christian Faith meeting me as I entered the parking lot, and that same feeling permeated everything that happened from getting out of the door of my car, to entering the building, to entering the sanctuary and throughout the service. This enthusiasm even continued as I was leaving. People greeting me, and extending their hand in fellowship, wishing me a good week, and I knew that when they left they were ready to go out and "preach the gospel to the world."

In all instances the churches where I walked away with a feeling of excitement were either independent or Evangelical. The mainline churches, to a church, and I visited the major mainline churches in the Denver Metropolitan area, were basically filled with the "frozen chosen." I'm sure the people were very nice people, and that they were very giving people, but they certainly weren't the kind of people that were going to go out and minister to the world. And this is the only way that the word of God will be spread to the world. If the church members aren't challenged on Sunday morning, or whenever they worship, they aren't going to go out and minister to the people around them, and in most of the mainline churches the people weren't challenged.

Truth be known, the mainline churches probably averaged in age somewhere above fifty- five years of age and the independent and Evangelical churches probably averaged about forty years of age and younger.

Having been raised in a more Gospel oriented church and marrying into a mainline denomination I began, at an early age, to see, but not understand, the differences between the two distinct thoughts and styles of the Christian Faith. I realize that there are many varieties in the Evangelical churches and in the mainline churches but for purposes of this treatise we will discuss just the **traditional Evangelical churches and the traditional mainline churches**.

I will begin by setting out my own personal prejudices. Having been raised in the church of the Nazarene in the forties and fifties I was subject to the denominations rule oriented Christian Faith. You can't dance, you can't wear makeup, you can't go to movies, and many more "you cant's," of which not doing the "you cant's," certainly won't get you to Heaven. When I married I married "out of the faith," so to speak. My wife was born and raised in the Presbyterian church where every church service, even then, was dead silence, not even a little laughter, and she was not about to go to the Church of the Nazarene where they said "amen" and "praise the Lord" during the service, and honestly I was tired of the "you cant's," so we joined her church, a United Presbyterian Church, in 1960. An interesting sidelight to the quiet Presbyterian Church was my discussion with the pastor about the deadpan faces and quietness of the congregation. He told me that he would love to have some feedback about the sermon during the service, or even after the service for that matter, but it never seemed to happen. Incidentally, he was an excellent minister and preached the Word of God, and lived what he preached.

Since that time I have taught in the public schools and college and have had part-time and full-time church music positions in Missouri Synod Lutheran, United Presbyterian, Independent Congregational, UCC Congregational, United Methodist, I had the privilege of being in on the beginning of the Evangelical Presbyterian denomination, Baptist General Conference, a non denominational church, an American Baptist church, and UPC/USA church. Whew, it seems like its time to take a breath. Over forty years of ministry in all, and every minute has been worth it. In many of those ministry's, besides running the music and arts programs, I had opportunities to preach, to manage the facilities, to hire and fire employees for the church at large and to chair the recruitment committee for the organization of the 1986 Denver Billy Graham Crusade choir, which included more than 8000 singers.

Over the years and in the variety of denominations in which I have been involved, I have found that generally there was not much difference in the denominations, except in the area of the essentials and the non-essentials. The biggest arguments came concerning communion and baptism or whether you can call a Christian a "born again" Christian. From my prospective if we as Christians could quit badmouthing each other and get on with spreading the "good news" about our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, we could win the world for Christ overnight.

Now you've heard my prejudices so let's get on to what I saw and heard in each of those churches. Generally speaking in the mainline churches the orders of worship had absolutely no flow to them. They reminded me of a high school musical directed by a drama person who had no idea how to tie together the music and the drama sections. You would have a certain section of the service and then you would stop and get ready to start the next part, and in this day of movies and smooth running TV programs the people are looking for more than that. They want to be taken from one portion of the service to

another with a seamless flow. There needs to be highs and lows, exciting moments and silent moments, and each of those pieces needs to fit together smoothly. What I found was a hodge-podge of pieces put together randomly without any understanding as to why. The hymns that they sang were not necessarily chosen to fit into the context of the whole but were there, it seemed like, because they needed hymns.

The hymns themselves are a major problem in the mainline church. There are many hymns in the new mainline denomination hymnals that are literally unsingable and many times hymns are selected for their lyrics and not for their singability, which for the normal congregation member is not fun. The reason one does hymns in a service is to include the congregation physically and mentally not just to have a hymn, and when they can't sing the hymns they quit then you have defeated the purpose of the hymn. The hymns are also there to be a part of the worship flow and hopefully a continuation of the message. In the more evangelical churches, especially the ones with blended services the hymns coupled with the choruses completed the meaning of the service. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that this blending of the lyrical content with everything that happened in the service happened in every instance, but generally speaking it happened more often in the Evangelical churches than in the mainline churches.

An interesting story

One of the only times anyone really talked to me was at a Church where I wore clerical collar shirt and a lady talked to me because she thought I was a pastor. I quite wearing that shirt after that.

The following are some of the things that I saw in the churches I visited that I thought might be of help to all of the pastors and churches. One thing that I would suggest is that each of you who has anything to do with worship listen to a tape of the service at least once a month and see what feels comfortable and what feels uncomfortable to you and make changes as they are needed.

I trust that you will pass along my suggestions to the people on your staff and that you will have your entire staff become members of our Tips For the 20th Century Church.

Notes from churches visited for your worship committee and pastor

- Up and down, up and down, up and down – don't do this in the service. You need to have some periodic movement just to keep your parishioners awake but don't overdue it. Does the congregation have to stand every time they sing or speak?
- Offering plates with long handles that go to the middle of the pew? An interesting thing I saw in one of the churches I visited.
- Pastor please put some drama in your message. If you need to take drama lessons then do it. This one thing will change your entire presentation.
- I do think it is important to have at least one usher in every aisle when you are taking the offering.

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- Passing the Peace. I think this works well. Make sure that your people know what it means to pass the peace.
- Symbolism in the church. What is the purpose? How much should there be?
- I realize that all Christians don't have to go out and preach the Gospel but they do need to be ready to witness when the need arises.
- The lyrics on the screen can't be too busy and they have to be readable. You need to have a large enough point size and the proper colors to make them visible. You also need a somewhat dark room or equipment that really has a strong throw.
- Do you have to sing every verse?
- Authentic people practicing an authentic faith – the people who go to church need to be this kind of people.
- Don't be a Christian freeloader.
- We need to be a 21st Century church with 1st century power.
- An interesting idea: at one church the Pastor offered a pew Bible to anyone who wanted one.
- Get your congregation involved in the worship. Have them repeat something you say even during the message, have them answer questions with a yes or no or answer a question by raising their hands, whatever you need to do to get them involved.
- Don't let your video camera people be distracting to the congregation (if you video your services).
- How can you say that you love God if you don't show it?
 - I. Take responsibility for yourself
 1. Everyone has a part in the work of the Lord. Use what you have been given.
 2. Don't compare yourself to others.
 3. Find your talent and use it.
 4. Accept your limitations.
 - II. Esteeming others
 1. Don't seek to cut off other members. God brings us to places we cannot get to alone.
 2. We cannot go along as a passenger. When all members fulfill their ministry, the life of God's ministry flows. We have the Son. We have life. We hold fast to the head (God), not to individual members, or the leadership.
- One church with probably 400 to 500 in attendance had at least 30 people to serve communion, that's great, make sure you always have enough people to move this along.
- Some churches included applause and in most of the churches it worked well. You just have to make sure that the applause is for what the Lord has just done in worship and not for some "star." You also need to communicate to your people that it is okay to not applaud if they don't want to.
- Let your people know that it is alright for them to worship in the style that they would like to. If they want to raise their hands that's fine, if they want to applaud that's fine, if they want to say praise the Lord let them do it and tell your other

members that they too are welcome to not do any of those things, but it is okay for the other people to do them.

- Pastor thinks that a church has to be either one that gets excited about worship or is very passive – there are no other choices. It's either hand clapping music or Bach and Rutter, but there has to be some excitement and energy.
- Please select hymns that are singable by the congregation – what did Martin Luther make the break from the Catholic for if we are not going to sing hymns that are singable?
- Announcements need to be a part of worship not before the service. They are part of the worship of the community and need to be included in the worship portion of the service, not before the service begins when many people are still in the narthex and can't hear them. Please, please, please do your announcements during the service—I mean at least 10 to 15 minutes into the service so everyone will get to hear them. In marketing you have to tell or show a person something at least seven times before they will remember it and for some reason in our churches we think we can tell them once and they will remember it and do what you want. When will we ever learn?

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- Announcements: Please don't read them; do them from memory and in an exciting way bring them to life and you will have people listen.
- Hymns need to move along tempo wise – don't let them drag.
- The church is an equipping center.
- Have your staff listed in the bulletin with both a phone number and an email address so people can get in touch with them.
- Laughter and repetition in your message are very important.
- To the people on the platform—be sure to watch the person or people who are presenting things—don't be looking out at the congregation.
- Always make sure you have at least one usher in every aisle or the congregation thinks that they aren't good enough to have a full contingent. It makes it awkward. And being an usher is a place where you can use new Christians or even non-Christians.
- If your Praise Team Leader is not good at introducing things don't have them do it, find other people to present the music.
- Make sure that you either have a license or don't print the words in the bulletin or put the words of songs on the screen.
- Many of the churches put the page number of the scripture in their bulletin so the illiterate church members don't even have to find the scripture at church. One

thing I found was, that generally speaking, only the Evangelical churches encouraged their members to bring their Bibles to church. When are we going to get back to encouraging our members to use their Bibles seven days a week?

- It is so important that you put the type of service that you are doing on your sign so people will know and it may attract more visitors. (Truth in advertising you know)
- One of the most important thing that you can do in the sanctuary is get the worship leaders as close to the congregation as possible. This includes the choir, the praise team, the pastor and all.

Notes for your choir, praise team, soloists and organist/keyboardist:

Choir

- Don't ever let your choir hold music and sing without folders.
- Don't allow any of your singers to sing in the dark, and I don't mean the dark as far as their Christian faith is concerned, I mean without any light on them.
- Make sure that your choir member's faces are mirroring what the lyrics are about. They need to show excitement and energy at all times.
- I think it is wonderful to have your choir in the aisles when they sing but make sure that they aren't so far down front that the people in the back of the sanctuary can't hear them.
- If you do opening and closing responses make them no longer than 10 to 15 seconds and with enough vigor, verve and energy that your congregation is propelled into the service and out of the sanctuary with real life and excitement.
- Responses need to be short and sweet – 30 seconds or less like a commercial. They have to sell quickly.
- Get your choir out of the loft and down into the congregation especially during the Cantata.
- When you are doing a major work make sure that you don't allow dead spaces unless they are supposed to be there.
- Dear choir members: During the cantata please don't turn pages with the soloist. The organ music needs to be at least enjoyable.
- Be sure to watch the person or persons who are singing solos or presenting things—don't be looking out at the congregation.
- Don't have the choir move from the loft to sit in the congregation even if it does help fill up the sanctuary—it takes too much time and makes it look like you don't have enough people.
- Contemporary Services typically start late. Why does this always have to be true? What's wrong with the contemporary folks that won't allow them to start on time? Start your service on time.
- Make sure that the piano is positioned so when you lift the lid the sound will go toward the choir and not the congregation.

Praise Team

Your praise team members need to keep their eyes open and focused on the congregation. Closing your eyes is for a nightclub. Remember you are leading the people in worship not just yourself.

- Don't turn the lights down on your worship team – you need to see their faces and they need to keep their eyes opened and focused on the congregation. Closing your eyes is for a nightclub. Remember you are leading the people in worship not just yourself.
- The praise team needs to be alive.
- Make sure that all singers on your praise team are standing – unless they are at a keyboard.
- Don't ask the congregation to sing if you are going to have the sound so loud that they can't hear themselves and if they don't know the songs and you don't teach them to them.
- When you do choruses don't take big breaks between songs – there needs to be a flow.
- Be sure to watch the person or persons who are singing solos or presenting things—don't be looking out at the congregation.
- Make sure that you either have a license or don't print the words in the bulletin or put the words of songs on the screen.

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Soloists and small groups

- Always have soloists where they are visible to all of the people in the congregation. Make sure that they make eye contact with the congregation.
- Soloists don't move until the final sound of the accompaniment ends.
- Make sure that you are in place to do special music – I visited a church where the soloist for the offering and the accompanist came down the center aisle to do special after the offering began and by the time they got started the offering was over half completed.

Organist/Keyboardist

- It's important for the organist/pianist/praise band to keep the hymns moving or they will die.
- Make sure that you have some variety in what you use in the service. Don't always use the same stops, the same meter, the same keys or anything that will get monotonous the more you use it.

Notes from churches visited for your sound person and video people

Sound

**Think “sound reinforcement”
not “sound blaster.”**

- Make sure that all instruments and parts are heard in the mix.
- Learn what the EQ knobs are for and how to use them. Make everyone sound as natural as possible.
- Don't play the accompaniment tape so loud that you can't hear the soloist or group.
- Lay back on the sound for the preacher so he/she can get louder and softer in their presentation.
- If you are going to use original video's within your service make sure that they are of excellent quality both sound wise and visually.
- If you have an instrumental bridge the you need to identify that on the slide so the congregation knows.
- Teach your people how to hold a mic so they look relaxed.
- Make sure that you change the words on the screen as soon as the last word on the screen is sung. Don't be late.
- Make sure that the sound balance is good – don't allow anyone to not be heard, especially the lead singers.
- Make your sound “sound reinforced” and not “sound blaster.”
- If you have a problem with static from your cordless mics (especially your lavs) it probably comes from one of three things.
 1. A loose or broken antenna wire
 2. A low or dead battery
 3. The placement of your receiver
 4. If you are having problems with your receiver it may be because it is too far from the microphones so move it closer.

Lyrics, etc. on a screen

- See if back screening helps if it's too light in the sanctuary.
- Don't have too much activity on the screen behind your lyrics.
- Make sure that the lyrics are large enough to read and that the background and the color of the letters has enough contrast to read them.

The following are notes that I took from my visits to more than 80 churches in the Denver area, Grand Junction, Colorado Springs, Boulder and Ft. Worth, TX. As you will notice I haven't identified any of the churches for their protection. If you see a church that seems like it is yours then it probably is or you are either doing the right things or making the same mistakes.

The following are the criteria that I used to evaluate each church.

They are in chronological order:

I tried to wear the opposite clothing that the church members would wear so I would stand out in the crowd.

- Was I greeted as I enter the parking lot or before?
- Was there someone to guide me into a parking place?

- Do they have enough parking?
- Are there are easy to find “visitor” parking spaces?
- Are there signs conveniently located to help me find where I am going?
- Am I greeted at the front door?
- Am I greeted when I enter the sanctuary?
- Is there someone to help me find a place to sit?
- Is the music worth being there for?
- Do they have a worship leader or praise team leading the music and are they any good?
- What kind of music do they do?
- Is the music exciting (full of life) and worshipful not slow and dead?
- When do they do announcements?
- Is the congregation friendly? Do they greet me anytime?
- Do they have enough ushers?
- Do they have everybody and his brother lead in worship because “We have to be politically correct?”
- Is there any laughter and joy in the service?
- What about the message?
- Is the presenter boring or exciting to listen to?
- Is the message worth listening too?
- Does the presenter give us time to think as well as times to laugh and respond?
- Does anyone come and greet me after church?
- Is there anyone at the door to greet me when I leave? This doesn’t need to be the pastor it could be anyone.
- I also looked through the bulletin to see if there seemed to be any outreach ministry.

2-23-03

WOW this is what a welcoming church and a church that sends people into the world to minister, to spread the Good News is all about. I was welcomed as I turned down the street to the church by a person guiding traffic. I was again welcomed when I was guided into the parking lot and when I was guided into my parking space. The person guiding me into the parking space even opened the door for me—I haven’t seen that before. That very same person asked if I knew where to go from there to which I responded no and he guided me on my way. At the church door were greeters and at the sanctuary door were another set of greeters with bulletins. When I entered the sanctuary I noticed that there were ushers in the aisles helping people find a seat—I have never felt so welcome. This is amazing. The people in the seats welcomed me as I was sitting—how refreshing. This is what a church that welcomes visitors should be like—a welcome wherever you go in the building.

The service was equally welcoming. It began with 30 minutes of contemporary music with a praise team, a choir and special music. They did the announcements after the 30 minutes of music so everyone was able to hear them. The message was 20 minutes long and gave you what you needed if you were not a Christian. They had people down

front who would meet with you after the final prayer if needed and they had people who greeted you and helped you find your way to the refreshments, coffee and fellowship after the service. They also helped you find your way out of the building and parking lot. How refreshing. I'm sure I won't find many of these in the future—I hope that I do, but I probably won't. We'll see.

From their bulletin and announcements it's obvious that they are a church that sends people out into ministry.

3-2-03

This morning I had the distinct privilege of visiting a Pentecostal church and was I awakened. They spent the first 30 minutes in singing and prayer, where they danced in the spirit and really got with it. The congregation which filled about three fourths of the sanctuary was a very diverse crowd, and their worship was designed to meet all of their needs. They didn't have a choir but they had a Praise Team of 12 people who really lead in worship, with their faces, their bodies and their whole being. The lead worshipper (the leader of the Praise Team) had a limitless amount of energy, although he had begun to lose his voice by the end of the singing. Yes, they did repeat the choruses ad infinitum but the leader was continually asking the congregation to recommit to the words of the songs. He quickly worked the crowd into a frenzy – they were on their feet singing, raising their hands, praying and dancing. Actually to the uninitiated this could almost look like a circus, but as far as they were concerned they were “Worshipping God,” and I have to tell you that even though this is not the type of worship I would want to go to each week, I certainly wouldn't say that what they were doing was wrong.

The announcements were included about 38 minutes into the service and were a very important part of their community worship.

They had the most interesting Prayer of Dedication, which included prayers for about everyone and everything you could imagine.

The average age of the congregation was probably 50 or younger. The one thing that I noticed about this church was that they certainly weren't very personable. I only had two people talk to me, and one of them I had to force to talk to me. Truthfully, I found this problem in all of the churches that I have visited except one and that one almost overwhelmed me with welcoming. It truly was an enjoyable experience.

The preacher for the morning made it very clear that all Christians had to work together to bring about change. It couldn't just be one small group, it needed to be the entire Christian Community praying and spreading the Gospel. She said that she was personally going to call all of the pastors wives in the Denver area and get them to get their women involved in citywide prayer for the happenings of the world, a possible war in Iraq and other problems around the world. She wasn't speaking against the war but she wanted prayer as to what God's will was.

The sermon for the day was concerning the responsibility of every Christian to get involved in the ministry in whatever way they can. There is a place in ministry for everyone so you can't say that you can't do anything. She said specifically that: “You can't be a Christian freeloader; you need to find out what is right for you and do it.

3-09-03

I just visited two churches this weekend that epitomize why the Christian church is dying. One church at least had some children as well as many older people but their worship resembled a funeral. They began with two ladies up front leading “Praise Songs,” and I use those words advisedly, who were not old but were probably in their 50’s. They looked like they had one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel. It was also obvious that the accompanist couldn’t play the music making for double jeopardy (actually a total loss). If at least the accompanist can play the music it can help the people sing but she couldn’t. I don’t believe that this is what God wants from us in 2003. He wants some energy and excitement in our bodies and our faces. Quite honestly the worship went downhill from there.

For some reason they separate the “Praise Music” from worship so the “Praise Music” starts at 10:50 and the service begins at 11:05 – this has always amazed me. Why doesn’t the worship begin when the organist begins their prelude—or for that matter why isn’t the worship service just a continuation of the worship we have been doing all week? They had three dour looking men on the platform and when they came up to talk they continued their dour looks. Being in worship didn’t change a thing that they did. They had a children’s choir from the local church school which sang, and they looked and sang with the same dour look that the other people had. When does worship become an exciting time? When does corporate worship become a time that you look forward to with anticipation and excitement—a time to put your best foot forward and your most exciting personage forward and let it show for God?

They had a lay speaker that morning that was very difficult to understand because he never opened his mouth. His message was not one that really would appeal to many people. I would suggest that you find something relevant and preach it loud and clear.

It’s really sad to see this kind of supposed worship happening because if visitors come they will be turned away from Christ. One of the hymns they used was singer friendly the other was not.

The other church I went to on this weekend was a mainline church where there were maybe five children from 5th grade to high school (this was the second service there may have been more at the earlier service) and approximately seventy five people 70 years old and older. Before the service started I overheard a lady in the row behind me say “This is the most excitement I’ve heard in this sanctuary in years. It’s probably because of the guest speaker.” That started my worship time in an interesting way.

One of the nice things they had were pleasant greeters at the door and ushers in the aisle to help you find your seat. The only problem was that the ushers were only about halfway down the aisles so the people didn’t sit down front.

This was a very traditional service with responsive readings and awful hymns (unsingable) from the 1989 hymnal. Again a very quiet laid back congregation and basically the same was true of the pastor. He was there but that was about it. He was fairly young and talked about his ministry with an organization like Young Life but he was obviously from the South from his accent and included long pauses in his speaking – I think he thought it was more Godly or maybe Christ like—I don’t know.

They had a handbell choir play that did quite well—when they finished the congregation applauded and the director turned around and bowed—what was that all about? One thing that really turned me on was when the minister acknowledged the handbells and thanked them. That’s a plus for the pastor.

This is a nice friendly place, but certainly not a place that is going to get someone excited about Jesus and bring them to the Lord.

These are definitely two examples of the “Dead Church Walking syndrome.”

3-16-03

I visited the 11:00 service of mainline church in Denver today. For the most part I found it to be a very pleasant visit. It seems like a place that the Lord is alive and growing. The congregation was made up of a wide variety of ages—what a relief after so many weeks of going to churches that were filled with old (there is nothing wrong with being old, but a church won’t last very long if all of their members are old) people. They had a good group of children that came down for the children’s message and many young couples. The service was traditional except for two choruses and flowed quite well. The organist played for every break that happened—which gets tiring but it worked out okay.

I was greeted very energetically at the front door—not always true at other churches—and when the people got up to greet each other there was a gentleman in the pew who climbed over everyone to greet me. I had already filled out the pew pad and only put my name on it so he was coming over to see if I was a first time visitor. This was more than I had received in most churches.

This church annoyed me by putting the announcements at 10:55 which was before at least 30% of the congregation had even entered the sanctuary. Why waste your time giving announcements if you’re not going to give them to all of the people—the entire community?

The congregation sang quite well and with a fair amount of energy, but the choir and youth choir were both lifeless. The service would have been better without them. Their directors were also lifeless, so what would you expect.

The preacher preached from behind the pulpit, from memory, but was much better and more in tune with the congregation when she came out from behind the pulpit and did an interview that was part of the sermon. Why can’t pastors get out from behind the pulpit? Jesus never preached from behind a pulpit—I don’t think!!

An interesting thing; all of the songs were printed and in the bulletin (words and music). One of the choruses was pitched so low that it was hard to sing. It wasn’t written in a key that was too low it was lowered by the organist. This was a problem because the congregation couldn’t sing it and it lost all of its energy.

An interesting statement I keep hearing from the pulpit is: “If you are able to stand please stand for the next hymn.” This is a nice gesture but it definitely tells us what is happening to the age of our members.

I liked certain portions of their worship order.

3-24-03

The church I visited today was another mainline church. I was greeted at the door in a very nice way but this was the only person who talked to me except the people at the greeting time. The sanctuary had many windows including a large skylight but with proper screen placement, back screen projection and large enough print and white on blue it was very easy to read the words on the screen.

The church service opened at 11:00am sharp with a bell ringer ringing four bells from the platform. Then the prelude began – at this point the sanctuary went from chatter to dead silence except for one person and many people looked around at that person – interesting. Another church that starts the service with the announcements at the beginning but at least they waited until 11:00 and rang a bell and the prelude.

All of the hymns and readings were on the screen, which is very contemporary, but nothing else was even close to new. This was an old dead church which is slowly dying from the inside out and they don't know it—or maybe they don't care.

The organist obviously doesn't know how to lead the hymns—the congregation just moped through the hymns, singing every verse very slowly—what praise?

The most interesting thing was when it came time for the offering the accompanist and the soloist came down the center aisle—after the ushers had already begun taking the offering, and the ushers were finished taking the offering before the soloist had gotten through the first fourth of the song. She sang a solo out of a Bach Chorale, which basically said nothing to anyone who lives in the 21st century.

One interesting aspect of the service was that six people, three ladies and three men (all of which were probably 65 years old or older) entered just before the service started and sat in the front row of the choir loft—to sing I suspected, but that was not to be, they just sat there and stood at the right times, etc. Interesting!!!

3-30-03

Today's church visitation was at a very contemporary church with a rock band and a star in front of the band. The people stood for almost the entire 40 minutes that they sang but didn't sing because: 1. the sound was too loud and 2. the congregation didn't know the music and it was obvious to me that the praise team hadn't bothered teach the music. The band was actually giving a performance – not leading in worship. Almost all of the music was written by the praise team leader—personally, I think it is very important that you do a good variety of music not just music by one composer. The service began late because the band was still practicing when it was time for the service to begin. It is most important that the band begin the service on time so that means that they have to finish practicing by at least 15 minutes before the service begins.

The offering was taken while the Minister began his sermon – very interesting. It was definitely a church that knew what church was about – it was obvious from their bulletin and other things around the church that they sent people out to minister to the world. The average age was probably around 40 years old. They were vibrant and alive – not very welcoming but turned on to Christ and the ministry from the pulpit was definitely focused on “going out to the world and bringing people to Christ.”

4-6-03

Well, today I visited a more Fundamental church, which I thought would have a lot of exciting things happening. Guess what? You can't always be right. The service I attended was one (9:30) of the two contemporary services—which, incidentally, was not to well attended. I admit I was surprised. This church had a nice open sanctuary with moveable chairs and lot's of room between the rows—how nice. You don't have to get up every time someone wants to get out.

This was one of those churches where they obviously had a beginning sound person or one that had only worked with a rock band; because all you could hear was the bass drum and the bass guitar. The voices were almost totally obliterated. Some of the congregations members tried to out shout the sound but it was hard.

The service opened with the Praise Band, A brass ensemble, a Praise Choir and a three member singing group. As I have already stated the sound was so bad that you couldn't hear the voices at all. What a waste. As soon as this song finished the choir and the brass ensemble people left and the Praise Band and the three singers stayed.

The service began 10 minutes after it was supposed to begin because the service before ran too long. The pastor needed to realize that the service is running long and cut down his sermon. This was one of the most boring services that I have attended—there was not one moment of relaxation. There was not one time during the service that anyone laughed. What a bore.

They did the communion Service before the sermon—some pastors would balk at this—it has to be after the sermon—I don't know why? They at least had some exciting music during communion in my opinion they did the music backwards. It began quite upbeat, but then they went to a slow soft song. I like to begin soft and end with an upbeat song to signify the resurrection. Oh well.

This pastor had the people stand during the scripture to show honor the scriptures. This is an interesting concept. This must be part of Reformed Theology? Pastor stayed behind the pulpit and read his sermon—pretty good presentation but too much in one place.

5-4-03

This Sunday morning was another very interesting morning. This was a church where the choir was out of town and many of their members were out of town. This church was one of the four largest churches in the Denver area in the 1970's and 1980's, but had only about 175 people in attendance this morning. This service was touted as a blended service, but it definitely wasn't a Blended Service—the only things that were anything but Contemporary were a traditional hymn—accompanied by the band and the Doxology at the end—a cappella. This was a perfect example why the Lead Worshipers should not close their eyes. This leader had his eyes closed most of the time and missed many words because he wasn't looking. That's not why I think your eyes should be open but that is definitely a good reason. He, I guess, was an ordained Pastor and had a hard time shutting his mouth and letting us worship in song. He kept talking throughout each of the songs.

They did include the announcements after the 30 minute music session—I appreciated that. They had a time of anointing with oil; people came down front for prayer and anointing with oil.

I liked the message, it extolled the values of loving one another no matter how they Baptize, take communion or anything else. I like that.

5-18-03

This morning I visited a church that has in the past had a pastor who thought he was pretty hot stuff. I got to this church and found out that they have a new pastor—what a pleasant surprise. He was breath of fresh air. He acknowledged everyone, patted everyone on the back for what they had done in the service and really communicated with the congregation. He used the entire platform and even went out into the congregation at times. He asked the congregation questions that he expected them to answer and also included laughter in his message.

I was greeted at the door and inside the sanctuary they had ushers to seat the people. This is so important.

The service had a very good flow. The opened with a prelude, then showed a video of a ministry that one of the Sunday School classes had been involved in, (the only problem was that the quality of the video was poor) then they had about 20 minutes of praise music, which included one traditional hymn, in which they transitioned from one song to the next without any breaks which is the way I like it to flow. They did their announcements on a video which is great idea, but again the video was of poor quality

This seems to be a very healthy church—how good it feels. This is a very full-of-life congregation that responded to the music directors leading and the pastors preaching with praise, laughter and answered questions. This pastor, who is new, challenged the congregation to get involved in their community and in fact just announced the hiring of a fulltime Pastor to be in charge of this ministry.

They used a variety of lighting effects throughout the service and did it very well.

6-15-03

This Sunday was one of those rare opportunities—I visited a black church. And as is usual with black churches they came dressed to the hilt, and they came prepared to worship. My only problem was that I wasn't (but I should have been) prepared for the length of the service. It started (it was supposed to) at 10:45 and I left at 12:10 and the preacher hadn't even started his sermon yet. I regretted having to leave.

To begin with they had many greeters at the door to welcome you. They also had people in the aisles to greet you—people with smiling faces that actually stayed there until 11:45 because people were still entering at that time. When the service began the sanctuary was about half full, by 11:45 it was probably two thirds full. The majority of the people in the sanctuary were seniors—not many younger people.

They had all visitors fill out a visitor's card as they came in and then introduced them individually within the service. The visitors seemed to enjoy that.

They had a men's choir today in honor of father's day. The choir loft is on the side of the sanctuary, which seems strange to me, but it is a fairly old sanctuary. There was a lot of music in the service. The instrumentation was a Hammond organ, a piano, a keyboard and a percussionist. They even included a secular song by Luther Vandross.

The choir sang a welcome song for the visitors. There is hardly a time in the service when there isn't some background music. They sang one traditional hymn which the congregation didn't know and they didn't do well.

The offering was very interesting—they had all of the people who pledge come down first and put their pledge envelope in the offering plate and then passed the plates to the remainder of the congregation. They used this, and they stated it specifically before the offering, to try to get one hundred percent of the members pledging. I'm not sure I would agree with that.

I have to admit they do get with it in worship. In all actuality they probably get more involved in their evening service than their morning service.

6-22-03

Today I visited another black Baptist Church and again they had a real spirit of Worship with a capital W. The interesting thing about it is that their choir was out of town, they had a visiting instrumental group, it was Youth Sunday, and they had a guest pastor but it still was an amazing service. Most churches that have the leaders out of town usually have the second string in for the service and if you are a visitor you usually wouldn't want to return the next Sunday—not here.

They did get started a little late and the usual late people came straggling in but not as bad as in other black churches I have been too. The youth choir was well rehearsed and sang beautifully. Here is another church that felt like the announcements were important enough to the community to put them within the service.

It was interesting the way they did the visitors. They had all visitors stand then greeted them all individually but didn't say who each one was and then had the congregation "give them a hug." Very interesting.

The ushers weren't as formal as they have been in other black churches that I have visited, but they still were very welcoming.

They do get with it in worship. They didn't have music behind the speakers, etc. like other black churches have, only adding music at the end of the sermon.

The pastors didn't wear vestments—they weren't as formal as some other black churches.

7-13-03

Today I visited a United Methodist Church that wants to have a Blended Service but it's obvious that they have no idea what a blended service is. They should stick with the Traditional Service until they find someone who knows how to do a Blended Service! I think they really desire to do a Blended Service and did make a valiant effort at it but they were totally unsuccessful. They had a "Praise Team" (in quotes because there was a question in my mind whether it was) that was for all intents and purposes "dead." They stood like robots with lifeless faces (with the exception of two people) and sang music that needed some energy. How sad! The piano accompanist for the Praise Music had no idea how to play this style of music. She played it like it was classical. They did have a drummer but he didn't do much. The singers didn't know how to sing music of this style, and the microphone placement not good.

They did greet me at the door but no one else said a word to me except a person I knew who saw me as I was leaving. He also said that the church had become the “Electronic Church” because they had to mic everything. They did mic a duet of a classical piece which didn’t need to be mic’d.

They had a good mix of ages in a full sanctuary. Probably seats 300 people. They really tried to sing and the congregation did quite well actually.

Another church with announcements at the beginning—at least they waited until after the prelude –which was the Praise Team.

The pastor basically talked with his mouth closed and was hard to understand. He let his voice drop at the end of every phrase which made it worse. He moved away from the pulpit (yeah) but read his sermon from 8 1/2 X 11 paper, which he held. Too bad! His sermon was trying to convince the people that the Government should give everybody everything—especially the poor. I think the Bible says that the church should take care of the poor not the government. Maybe I’m wrong? His whole message was presented in a very dour way; he never gave us a chance to let our hair down. How depressing and boring.

7-20-03

I visited a mainline church today. This is a friendly church with people greeting you at the front door and at the door of the sanctuary as well as inside the sanctuary. They have ample parking for the people who are there (probably 75-90) and for future growth.

Let’s talk about the service: They did the announcements at the beginning of the service which left a number of people in the community out. The readings were too slow—the people just about went to sleep while reading them. The hymns started out at a good speed, but the praise team leader kept slowing them down with his piercing, obnoxious voice. It’s too bad because the congregation wanted to move them along. There were too many unison readings in the service, which ruined the flow.

There were mostly older people in the congregation with a few younger people. Really a very friendly group but I’m not sure they know why they are there. This is a church that seems to have a pastor who is a dictator and doesn’t have anyone following him.

8-3-03

This morning I visited a Church, which was full of people—probably 750 or more, but they weren’t full of the spirit. They are in a beautiful new sanctuary built a little more than three quarter round. They had a very interesting mix of people. There were people of all ages and all colors. It was interesting that the African Americans were nicely dressed and the whites wore shorts, etc.

It was a one-hour service with a ten minute uninspired sermon. The Preacher read the message, but with little if any feeling. There was one Pastor greeting at the door and no one else. There were ushers in some aisles, but they weren’t friendly. They didn’t even have enough ushers to take the offering—people had to pass plates across the aisle.

The music was, to be blunt, awful. They had two female singers who had a hard time not going flat. This is no doubt the worst I have ever heard. The accompanist for the

most part was excellent. It was interesting that the people left during the final hymn. When the final hymn ended almost everyone was out of the Sanctuary.

A thing that caught me by surprise was the two pages of advertising in their bulletin. I have to admit this is a first for me. I'm not saying it is bad, but I have never been to a church that had advertising in their bulletin.

I felt no warmth here. No feeling that the Spirit of Christ was even close to the church, but there obviously are many people attending this church. This was another "Dead Church Walking."

6-29-03

I visited my first Contemporary Service today. I am going to visit Contemporary Services at the more traditional churches to see what they think a Contemporary Service is. This is an interesting one. First of all the "Praise Team" is mediocre at best. The congregation never really got with the music. They pitch the music to low for the most part and it is almost impossible to hear the singer's words. They really do try but they just don't understand what it is all about. The young man who leads it is from a foreign country and is very hard to understand.

The first major problem that I find with Contemporary Praise Teams is that they are never ready to start when it is time. They started five minutes late. I guess they want to be "hip" – like the modern rock band that is always late. This group didn't play anything before the service, which I think is very important. You need to play prelude music for the people as they enter the sanctuary.

The singer's voices are not indicative of the style of music they are doing. They need some pop voices—which they don't have.

Another problem with many Praise Teams is that they don't know when to stop. It's important that you get the feel of your congregation and stop the music even if you haven't finished all of the songs that you have planned. I did like the way they went from one song to the next—there was no break. Good flow.

Your praise team needs to at least look like they are alive—all deadpan faces.

The drummer had a Plexiglas screen in front of him but it didn't help—his only volume was loud.

You need to make sure that the words on the screen match the words that you are singing.

I'm not sure that there is a reason for a service like this if it's not going to appeal to a different segment of the congregation. There was a very small group of people here. They need to move this service to a smaller room and move into the sanctuary when the number of people warrants a move.

8-10-03

Today I visited a church that has in the past been a very vibrant and alive church—just as many churches have been. As I entered the parking lot at about 10:25 for a 10:30 service I noticed that there were only a half a dozen cars there, which got my mind moving. Why so few cars? Have they canceled church? Is the church dying? Or is it already dead? I honestly hoped for the "closing church idea." Well, I'm afraid that the

church is dying. I was sorry to hear that. The message of the day was confirming that and trying to entice the congregation to forget about the past and look to the future where there are possibilities of again spreading the “good news.” It actually was a very good message—I’m not sure what the congregation thought about it, but it was direct and to the point.

The first thing was the little old man who met me before I went into the sanctuary. I put my hand out to shake his and he said: “I don’t want to shake your hand, I want a hug. Handshakes are for friends and hugs are for family and around here we are family.” So I gave him a hug. As I entered the sanctuary I encountered the pastor at the door—he shook my hand, welcomed me and gave me a bulletin and I went on in. There were about fifteen people in the sanctuary, which probably holds two hundred people, which led me to believe that the church was dying. I opened the bulletin and found out that this service was the Contemporary Service—well what a surprise. On the sign out front it says: Services 9:00 and 10:30 with no indication as to what each service is. Generally when I see a sign that doesn’t tell you what kind of services they are you generally think that they are Traditional. Well I stayed to find out what was going to happen. It is so important that you put the type of service that you are doing on your sign so people will know and it may attract more visitors. (Truth in advertising you know.)

As is typical with Contemporary Services they started late. Why does this always have to be true? What’s wrong with the contemporary folks that won’t allow them to start on time? The praise team consisted of five singers, one who played guitar, and a sound person who played CD’s. It really worked out well. The accompaniment didn’t drown out the singers—how refreshing. Actually, the singers even sang fairly well. They weren’t great but not bad. They didn’t understand how to sing in the style of the music but they did sing in tune. They weren’t very exciting to watch; in fact they were boring to watch. They had the singers back at the back of the platform—you need to put them as close to the congregation as you can. The pastor stood down front right next to the congregation why not the singers?

There were a good variety of ages in the service, just not many of each. They didn’t give the visitors any idea about registering.

8-17-03

How interesting it is to go to a Contemporary Service at a church that is traditionally traditional. It’s always obvious that they have no idea what a Contemporary Service really is and what should happen in a contemporary service. First of all this church was no different than 90% of the churches that I have visited—there was no one to greet you even at the front door of the church. The lady who gave me a bulletin did say hello, but not another soul said a word to me as I entered the sanctuary. There were probably seventy five people in attendance and the majority of them were fifty and over. There were a few younger people—maybe seven or eight.

The Senior Pastor was dressed in his suit and tie. The young lady who preached did so from down front, and the pastor also did the announcements from down front. There was not much joy in this service although they did ask for prayers for “Praise the Lord’s and the hurting which was good.

The Women's Association is still strong in this church. They had a presentation – six ladies all at least sixty, which wasn't bad but all they did was tell what they did with their money not if anyone was brought to Christ through the missions that they supported.

The service: As usual in a traditional church with a Contemporary Service when 11:15 came (the service time) there was no one in sight to begin the service. At 11:17 the Praise Team Leader came up front and motioned to all of the service leaders to come over to the side where they had prayer. The service began at 11:20. the Praise Team made up of four ladies in their 40's and up with synthesizer accompaniment lead the congregation in singing two choruses—not one's I had ever see or heard before with the words in the bulletin not on a screen. You don't need to have a screen but it does help when you want to change anything in the service like they eventually did. There was only one of the four ladies who even looked interested and she wasn't anything to speak of. All of the music was pitched to low for congregational singing and with the exception of one they were not even good melody wise for the congregation to sing. Oh well?

After the songs the Pastor did the announcements, not very well—he read them and even stumbled over that. Now we have the prelude and begin a somewhat traditional service. A responsive reading and then some more Praise Songs—not the ones in the bulletin—one from the hymnal and one that was a familiar Praise Song to me but not to them—so it was quite difficult without the words. The worst part of it was that they accompanied and sang the Praise Song like traditional hymns. How sad!!

It was interesting to me that they hardly ever said the word Jesus in the service it was usually God or Lord. Very Interesting!!

Well to be honest this morning I attended another church that is one of the “Walking Dead” and they don't even know it. When will they ever learn?

8-24-03

I visited a church that I have been to quite often in the last 2 years and nothing has changed. The Pastor does preach a good message—he doesn't challenge the congregation to go out and preach the Gospel to the world, but he does challenge them to have Christ in their hearts. That's better than nothing. He talked about them going to the baseball game the night before and had an opportunity to challenge them to cheer this morning like they did last night, but he didn't. Too bad.

The special music at the offering was barely ok but the singers literally never looked at the congregation. How sad! That's the only reason they are there is to lead the congregation and if they don't look at the people who are they singing to then what have you accomplished?

8-31-03

Today's church was interesting for a number of reasons. First, it was Southern Baptist and my idea about a Southern Baptist Church is that it will definitely be an exciting service. Well it wasn't. Second, it was, based on all of the other churches, a warm and inviting church. The congregation was very welcoming at the greeting time. Third, when the service was on the people basically went to sleep. I'm not sure they

heard anything the pastor said. The music director let all of the hymns die. The choir was far less than good. The pianist, a very old lady who was far past her prime, was not good and she sang the offertory solo. Out of the 13 people in the choir there were only two who looked like they might be alive, the remainder were basically dead. Fortunately the choir did their anthems with taped accompaniment so they didn't have to endure the accompanist. Even as bad as the choir was the pastor still acknowledged them.

One thing that did impress me was that the pastor came to talk to me as a visitor before the service began. That's a first. There were two teenagers who saw me and welcomed me before I got to the building—which was nice. There was no one to greet me at the door. They did have a fairly good mix of ages in the congregation, so there is something to build on.

The sermon: First of all the sermon was too long (50 minutes) because he included too much—and there was too much repetition. For instance he read 22 examples of scripture about prayer from Acts, which became meaningless after a while. He could have read a few examples and said that there are 16 more examples just in Acts, and it would have accomplished more than what reading them all did. It was a very worthwhile and meaningful sermon but it was so long that by the time he got to the end the congregation had forgotten what it was about. Prayer is very important but don't embarrass the congregation by inferring that they not doing it, that won't get them to do it. The pastor said that getting the church to be a praying church was one of his goals at the beginning of the year. Maybe that was one of goals, but from his message he hadn't accomplished his goal. My guess is that he somehow hadn't really sold that idea to the congregation. This is an important question what do you need to do to sell your congregation on your vision or your goals?

The music director seems like a nice fellow but he needs to find out what the purpose of the music is, and that presenting the music with a little bit of excitement can provide the congregation the spark that they need to really get involved in the music and worship.

Generally speaking this was a “Dead Church Walking.”

9-7-03

How sad to go to this Church and have between 500 and 600 people there with maybe 200 from the church and the remainder were visitors for an anniversary celebration. This is a church that at one time had a very active membership of over 4000 members—they are on their second pastor since the pastoral team that built the church left and they are now down to under 700 members with average attendance of 400 for two services. It's obvious that the two pastor who followed have taken the church down memory lane back to the numbers they had before growth pastor arrived. This was the Sunday of the 40th anniversary celebration. There was life here today but it was only the former members who were here for the anniversary that brought the life. All of the music, led by the music director, was too slow. The poor person who was changing the screen for the lyrics was late changing every time. It's just another “Dead Church Walking,” and I'm not sure they are walking—they may just be crawling. Oh well life does go on.

9-14-03

This church was not easy to find. It was off of the main drag on a dirt road. There needs to be a sign down by the road so people will know where to turn. The reason I found it was because I saw it from down the road.

There were many good things happening here today there was lots of energy throughout. The pastor has very energetic and exciting presentation; most of the people in the vocal ensemble actually look excited. I was greeted at the outside door but when I got to the Sanctuary door the lady giving out bulletins was otherwise occupied and finally noticed that I was there and gave me a bulletin. There was no one inside sanctuary to help. A praise band was playing the prelude? What they played was a jazz improvisation which I normally enjoy, but what they played was not very interesting. Oh, on the third tune they finally play a tune that is familiar. Interesting the drummer is in a fiberglass cage but it is right in a place that's like a shell, the sound just goes straight into the sanctuary, and makes it quite loud. The lady who plays the piano, the music director, is a banger when she plays with the praise team; she needs to back off a little. When the praise team singers sang you couldn't hear them the drums were too loud.

I'm not sure where they got their praise songs but they all sounded the same and were not fun to sing. They also had them pitched so low that they were hard to sing. They had a children's choir sing and they did ok but they shouted everything. The director doesn't know how to get them to sing properly. The choir sang a song that was basically a two part arrangement—there were 31 people in the choir and they were pretty good, but they also shouted everything. Director directed with an up and down feeling so there was no flow. But they weren't bad.

They didn't greet visitors at any time. Nor did they pass the pew pads.

The sound was not bad, but sometime late with the words on the screen and turning on microphones.

9-21-03

Wow, a Lutheran Church that uses wine for Communion! I wouldn't miss that. I was greeted by one person who was walking down the stairs as I came in and the person who gave me a bulletin sort of greeted me. The church has a beautiful sanctuary with a lifeless service. The pastor seemed like maybe he wasn't alive. When he preached he basically read the message and literally hardly ever looked up from his script. His was a thirteen minute message filled with interesting thoughts and ideas. There were four children in the sanctuary and probably 75 people from 55 and up. An associate pastor came into the platform area and knelt and prayed before the service began—I thought that was a good sign.

They sang a number of choruses that were congregationally unsingable—it's just too important to have the congregation sing so you need to have songs that are singable. The problems were that there were too many wide skips, too many words to fit into a few notes, etc. Those songs were just too difficult to sing.

They had a teenage boy read the scripture and he did quite well. Too many churches are excluding the youth from their services. This was another one of those services where it was sit, stand, sit, stand, you can't believe how tired I got of that.

9-29-03

Today is church number 50 in two years—can you believe that? Regretfully, it's not much different than most of the others churches I have gone to. There were three men who greeted me at the door, but from then on I wasn't very welcome. I did force one man to speak to me and shake my hand out side of the service but that was all. In the service a few people greeted me at the greeting time but that was because I went to them.

This was the 9:30 service and they had a total of 54 people in the sanctuary including the pastor, the music minister, the praise team (band included), an associate pastor and the congregation. Wow, this is a church that is building. It looks like they have plenty of room to grow right here to me. Oh well. "If we build, they will come?" Most of the people were my age (60's) and older.

The praise team was a 70's Peter, Paul and Mary group which was really quite good but if this is what they use for all services they will never draw any young people. They did use lay people to pray in the service—good! There were three men and three women, piano, acoustic guitar, trap set, congas, and some type of synthesizer.

The sign on their fence says "New service at 9:30" and I understand that this service has been around for awhile? Originally the sign said "9:30 service" which led me to believe that that was the only service—they changed that sign which was good.

They had pre-service music listed in the bulletin but the only pre-service music that they had was a pianist practicing on a piece of music for the service—that was not pre-service music! The service began at 9:30 and there were only a handful of people there. The Praise Team was just wondering around aimlessly or talking to each other.

The one thing that I noticed was that the people brought their Bibles and used them. They did the announcements within the service (actually at the end of the service) which I appreciate.

They had a good mixture of songs tempo wise and they didn't kill any songs by singing them to slow.

This church was not much different than all of the others I have attended—they think they are doing well because they are so introspective that everything looks good to them.

10-5-03

Well another church that has a lot going for it but they have so much more against them that they will just trudge along feeling like they are doing well. Getting into the parking lot is a trick—there are three churches that have the same entrance into the parking for their respective parking lots so this can be tricky. No one in the parking lot spoke to me but the person who gave me the bulletin said hello—he made me go to him to get the bulletin but he did say hello. There was a welcome table just inside the front door but there was no one at it so you couldn't ask any questions. The people were busy talking to each other and weren't available to talk to other people.

This was the contemporary Service which was scheduled to begin a 11:09—this is an interesting concept to begin at an odd hour and sometimes it works. Not many people in the service (about 75) and they, with the exception of the high school kids, were pretty dead, but there were a number of young people. The praise team was a 70's Praise Team with two acoustic guitars, a piano, a synthesizer, a trap set and 5 singers of all ages. They don't have any idea what Contemporary Music is and how it should be performed.

The songs were okay but the ranges were not good—they were too low. This was another traditional service that was masquerading as a Contemporary Service. They included responsive reading, etc. Incidentally the choir sang for the Communion Service which was a nice touch. After the worship leader asked any first time visitors to stand (incidentally I didn't stand) and no one did he said; "We like that." That worries me a lot.

10-12-03

Wow, a church that has its act together. The praise team for the most part was excellent, the preaching was excellent—the entire service had a worshipful flow. I actually went to a church that was up-to-date and allowed me to worship. The preacher preached about building community, but they did the announcements at the beginning before the entire congregation was in the sanctuary, which did trouble me a little. He asked the people if the wall was the church, or the pews were the church or if people are the church and built his message around that idea. He preached from memory and moved around—there were a number of times where the people laughed and verbally responded which was good—an excellent presentation.

I was not greeted by anyone except when a person needed in my pew and during the greeting time. Even then I generally had to go to them. Mostly the people were greeting their friends. A lady outside one of the doors was helping some visitors find where their children should go to Sunday school.

Interesting how they categorize their services: 9:00AM Service (A more traditional service), 10:30 (A more contemporary service).

10-28-03

Today *The Phantom Pew Sitter(s)* were two young ladies. The first thing they did was call the church on Sunday morning hoping to get some kind of directions from a live person or on a message machine. There were no directions on the machine so they left with a slight idea of the direction. They found the building coming from the south and were still not sure if they had the right place because from the street the most predominant sign was a Spanish congregation sign. They did park in the lot and found their way toward the front door. As they approached the building they saw greeters handing out bulletins so they now felt like they were in the right place.

The greeters and everyone they met were very friendly. When they got near the door, there were two gentlemen outside greeting. They asked for their names and wondered if they were first time visitors. One gentleman, who they later found out was the head pastor, asked them about Sunday school. He then took us to the classroom and introduced them to two ladies who were already there. He was stopped a couple of times on the way there, and he was always good about introducing them to whoever stopped to

talk with him. He always remembered their names. One lady even hugged them. Once in the classroom, he told us that the teacher of the class was the choir director and that several of the members of the class were in the choir, and they would be there as soon as choir practice was over. The two ladies in the classroom were very friendly. They both chatted with them. When the teacher arrived he said that they had had technical problems that they had to resolve. They felt that the class did a good job of making them feel welcome and encouraged them to participate in the class....

After class no one offered to take them to the sanctuary or sit with them. Too bad. Most of the people in the class were in the choir so they sat on the platform. ... There were probably 200 to 250 people in the service. Even though we were in the middle of a large city they felt like they were in an old-fashioned country church. The worship service was mostly hymns. They only did one worship chorus and it was an older one. Worship was pretty formatted. Everyone stood when told to stand, there was no clapping or anything like that, but everyone did seem to sing.

The only “specials” ... that morning were the choir and a piano soloist. The choir anthem was in style of a hymn probably 10 years old.

The people were invited to greet those around them and if there were any visitors they were to make them feel welcome. We had at least 15 to 20 people introduce themselves to us. The pastor even brought his wife over and introduced her—he even remembered our names. While I felt that everyone was genuinely friendly, I felt a little overwhelmed with that many people coming over and introducing themselves. I wasn't sure if they just didn't get many visitors or what.

The message itself was long, about an hour. Maybe it just felt long because it's been a while since I've been in a church that had that much time devoted to the sermon. I really detected a lot of legalistic standards in his sermon. ... Surprisingly most people seemed to stay awake—the only people that I really saw nodding were elderly. ... I also noticed that while not very many people fell asleep, there were some who were distracting themselves in other ways, flipping through hymnals or their Bibles. This part of the service too reminded me of a very old fashioned church—pastor speaking up front, congregation quietly and reverently listening. There was no lay involvement until the end of the service when an elder went forward to dismiss the congregation in prayer.

The Phantom Pew Sitter said: “My overall impression was that it was a very friendly church, but very old fashioned. Had I been blindfolded and dropped into the building I would have guessed that I was in some small rural area and most likely many years back in time. I found it hard to believe that a church like that existed in present time in a major city.”

1-3-04

Today I went to what the Denver Post recently called an Emerging Church--I'm not sure what's emerging. It wasn't any different than any other contemporary church. They began with 10 minutes of prelude from the Praise Band. Then three praise songs, announcements, introduction of the preacher for the day and ended with one praise song as the offertory and two more praise songs. The majority (probably 95% of the people were 40 and younger and were not very friendly. They had coffee and rolls in the sanctuary. WOW! The people didn't sing because the sound was so loud that they

couldn't hear themselves. The praise team—three singers and a band of four—were quite good. The church meets in an old mainline church sanctuary and has four services a week (8:30, 10:00, 11:15 and 6pm) and the mainline church has one service on Sunday mornings at 9:30.

It was very sad to see the old people from the mainline church leaving as the people from the Emerging church came in, but that's what happens when you don't listen to the Lord. This is a difficult changing of the guard. The building is landlocked and has two small parking lots that will hold about 30 cars. The sanctuary is very drab and dark, but the Emerging church tries to change that feeling with paintings and lights that they bring in for the services. It's too bad that these old people in the mainline church can't see the handwriting on the wall and become a part of this new church.

1-11-04

Today I am visiting an interesting mainline church that is actually quite boring. They have everything that happens in the service printed in the bulletin. The pastor sang the responses—he wasn't bad but he is not someone I would like to listen each Sunday. The people sang but they were not very excited about being there—they knew the music (they've probably sung it a thousand or more times) so they sang. There was no choir just a pianist who played a solo for the offertory. This was not very interesting for a visitor. They did some music during the service that only had the words in the bulletin which was fine for the members because it was obvious that they knew the song, but it was not good for a visitor. There was a good mixture of ages and a large number of children. The sanctuary is in three quarter round with moveable chairs which is good for a church on the move. Lots of things going on in the church, but basically things for the people not ways to get the people out to minister to the world.

1-18-04

Today I visited a very interesting mainline church. At one time in its history it was a very successful church. Currently it tries to look like a successful church but is slowly dying. It looks like the pastor is just waiting to retire and hoping the church will survive until then. He seems to be close to that age (somewhere in his 60's). The congregation probably numbered 150 to 175 and 98% of them were in their 60's. The choir numbered 52 (which is great) and a large majority of them were 60 and older. They did well --all of the music was classical. The piano was on the wrong side of the choir and with the lid up the congregation could hear it well but the choir couldn't.

They have parking problems—there isn't much. They ran the sound system to hot for the most part. The sound in the sanctuary was very similar to a cathedral sound and was somewhat echoy which is not generally what a younger congregation is looking for. This church seems like a very active church doing the normal mainline church thing—ministering to social concerns. The pastor crammed a 20 minute sermon into 12 minutes. He put both elbows on the pulpit with his mouth about 2 inches from the microphone and read his message faster than I have ever heard anyone in my life. The message was good, but it was socially oriented. This was an interesting place, but not a very friendly and what I saw would not entice a visitor to come again next week.

1-25-04

This was a very interesting church to attend. They were full of energy--the youth praise team lead in worship and except for the fact that they needed a little direction in stage presence they did well. The sound person actually ran the sound so loud that if you were in the congregation you couldn't hear yourself singing, which is usually a problem. The sanctuary was full at the beginning, but when the children left there were many open seats—they had a large group of children. The youth group kids helped with the message which was interactive between them and the pastor at the beginning. He had them out in the congregation and he was there also which got the congregation involved. He also used a Power Point Presentation to demonstrate his ideas—this was good.

One problem was that the lot was full when I came and no one to help me find a parking spot. Also, the only person who spoke to me was the person who gave me the bulletin. I'm afraid that they have fallen into a rut and are only concerned about themselves. This is a church that could be turned around quickly.

2-8-04

This was an interesting church and service. Again a church with probably 90% older people—very few young people. The pastor was out of town so we got a replacement who preached a 50 minute sermon. It was okay but too long. I didn't receive a greeting when I came in the door. The drummer came down the center aisle and greeted me as he went past—that was good. I did have one person greet me at the greeting time. He told me a little about the church and invited me to fellowship time and Sunday school. They had a good drummer, bassist and keyboardist but the praise team was awful. It was obvious that they didn't want to be there. Actually they all had good voices but their stage presence was absolutely awful. The praise team did 30 minutes of music which was devastating. The praise singing reminds me why the church is dead. They had a problem with the sound system on the last song and didn't get it worked out until after they finished. They never said anything about visitors even when they said to greet those around you. This is a church that is dead and doesn't know it. This is a church that changed their name but not who they were so they are still dead.

2-22-04

I went back to the church I visited on the 8th to hear the senior pastor. I again didn't receive much of a greeting going in or going out. There was no greeting of visitors during the service, not even when the pastor told the people to greet each other. He had a bit in the bulletin about how to recognize personalities from their sneeze and told the people to find out how other people sneezed. The church was a little bit fuller this time, but they just had more "old" people. The praise team was not any better than the last time, but the band included more musicians and they were very good. The choir (16 people) sat in the front three pews and went up into the choir loft to sing the offertory. Oh, and by the way, when the choir got into the loft they were in the dark. You couldn't see any faces. They were about average. The director directed with a baton and had no idea how to direct a

spiritual. First of all to direct a spiritual you need your hands not a baton. Interestingly, immediately after their anthem they had a time to speak to people around you and the choir left, got out of their choir robes and sat in the congregation.

The service began with announcements and then the Praise Team sang for 30 minutes with a prayer in the middle. Then we went to prayer and the choir and then the sermon and ended with a hymn. This pastor needs to work on his sermon presentation. He shouted at the congregation for the entire time. He did allow for some interaction with the congregation which was good and he had some good audio visual things before and during his message, but his shouting presentation was not something I would want to go to every Sunday. There was no music before the service just dead silence. A number of churches do this. Why? Even a CD is better than nothing.

2-29-04

Wow, what fun to go to a church that has some life and understands what it means to be a Christian. There were people in the lot guiding traffic, people at the front door greeting you, people at the doors of the sanctuary giving you a bulletin and greeting you, and ushers in the aisles greeting you and helping you find a seat. They had a number of visitor parking spaces at the front of the parking lot. There were speakers in the parking lot playing Christian music. The choir included 48 people, but they were basically window dressing. They only sang with the Praise team on the offertory. We began with 20 minutes of praise music and continued with prayer and announcements (good to hear the announcements when the people are there instead of the very beginning when at least a third of the people are not in the sanctuary yet). The ushers actually stayed in the aisles throughout the sanctuary until after the offertory helping people find seats. The choir also left after the offertory. They video tape the service and show it live on the screens in the sanctuary.

They had a room specifically for visitors to get information. There was a coffee shop with donuts available in the narthex. The service ended with a very laid back alter call. Even though this church is considered a fundamental church they really minister in a very non-judgmental way. This was a very exciting and enlightening service.

3-7-04

Too bad! Today I visited another church that is dead and doesn't know it. Well maybe they do but they sure aren't admitting it. They are still in the dark ages in their service. There were about 100 people in the sanctuary mostly old with a few young couples mixed in. The music was old, the style was old and the church building and service were cold. This was a downtown church where it is hard to build and grow, but you need to do something or close your doors and send your people to churches that are alive.

3-14-04

This was a church that had a lot of life. It is on the outer edge of the downtown area and the church was full. Going by the 80% rule they were well over 80% full. They

have plenty of parking including the parking lot across the street. They were not overly friendly as I went into the building. They were a little more friendly within the service. The congregation was filled with mostly young people (40 and below). As usual (in churches with praise teams) the praise team met on the platform at 10:30 sharp (the service time) and began discussing something—not praying, but discussing something in the music. Then they took a few minutes to do a sound check for a violin. This should have been finished before the service began. Oh well. It's too bad that this is what praise bands are known for—never starting on time.

The service itself and the congregation were very alive. There was a wonderful spirit in the sanctuary. You could hear the congregation sing because the sound was “reinforced” and not “sound blaster”—how nice. They included many of creative ideas in the band sound and in the service. For the offertory they had a dance group pantomime to a recording—well done. They seem to be community oriented—they are having a celebration for the local high school basketball team the next day—they are the state champs. They are very hands church in missions both within the community and worldwide. Used a video to promote a short term mission and Power Point, but the people running the Power Point were not very with it. The pastor read his message—he is very fidgety, and is not easy to watch. They included an alter call. They are obviously growing.

3-28-04

Well, today I visited another church that would improve the kingdom of God on earth greatly if they closed their doors and encouraged their members to go to churches that are alive and ministering for Christ. The sanctuary was cold and so was the atmosphere. This is a church that is probably half black and half white. The Senior Pastor is black and seems like a very bright potential pastor, but he doesn't have much to work with. The organ prelude was generally well done but not really worshipful. It was women's Sunday so only the ladies of the choir sang—they were about average but the anthem they sang was far less than average for worship. The person at the door welcomed me but not another person did until the greeting time. Both the senior pastor and the associate pastor greeted people within five feet of me before the service but neither one greeted me. Oh well. They did ask first time visitors to stand and they gave them a gift. The sanctuary probably seats 600 people and there were probably 150 to 200 people there and they were all spread out. They had a reception of new members but they had no one to receive. They did mention that they had one person joined in the first service as an associate member.

Everything was very bland—no excitement at all. A handbell choir played (they were very good) all dressed in black—how depressing! The sound was AWFUL—we had feedback with everyone who spoke. That's hard on everyone's ears. The women's association officers were installed—average age probably 70. This is where women's associations have gone. They are for all practical purposes dead. There were probably 15 children in the sanctuary—that was good. The high school kids did a skit and did it quite well but the youth director had to announce it and tell us what it was and not let us see it and decide for ourselves—too bad. The pastor did a short message reflecting on the high school skit and did well. The message was short and sweet and was away from the pulpit.

The choir sat in the congregation and sang from the steps and it took them too long to get in place. The choir was about average but the music as usual was old and hackneyed. The service seemed totally unorganized—it looked like no one had talked to anyone else including the pastor and his wife.

4-18-04

This church is one of the reasons that the Contemporary service gets such a bad name. This was by far the worst I have ever seen. If I went as a visitor with the intention of returning if it met my needs it would only take the first five minutes in the service for me to decide that I didn't want to be there then, let alone come back later. This was a traditional service in the veil of a contemporary service. It was obvious that no one there knew what a contemporary service was. The praise team which consisted of three guitars, one bass, a trap set and one extra singer was at the service but it was obvious that they didn't know why. Actually they weren't bad instrumentalists but it was like taking a garage band and making them the praise team. They had no idea what to do. The group with some proper training could probably eventually do okay. The lead guitarist had an okay voice but as far as I could tell no one else in the group should sing by themselves. The drummer could have been gone for the morning and no one would have ever known—he was non-existent most of the time. None of the group knew anything about mic technique which for this type of group is vitally important. It was also obvious that the sound person didn't understand sound reinforcement and couldn't keep up with the changes of words on the computer which made it difficult for the congregations to sing. In all honesty I felt like I was sitting around a campfire singing songs with the middle school youth group.

Let's talk about the rest of the service: Even when the service is led by lay people it is important that it run smoothly, because if I am a visitor that day I want to see what you do and see if it will appeal to me. There was nothing within before or after the service that would entice me to come back to this church. The lay speaker was by far the worst thing I have ever experienced in a church of any size. He needs some mentoring before he ever speaks again. His prayer was no prayer at all. To me this service was like going to a Rotary Club meeting except the Rotary Club meeting would be more exciting. First of all I arrived early to watch the people that went into the 9:30 service and they were about 90% 60 and above. I would bet that is also true of the earlier service. When I went into the 11:00 service I was not greeted by one person—I had to go and find my own bulletin and I was one of approximately 35 people who attended the service—including the speaker and the lay leader. The parking lot was about 60% full and as far as I could tell there were no visitor parking spaces so visitors would have to park quite a way from the church. The narthex was filled with some kind of book sale so it was like going through a maze just to get in and still no one talked to me. When I go to church like this I totally understand why the church is dying.

5-16-04

I visited a 10:30 contemporary service today at a church where I had visited a traditional service a few weeks ago. This service was not a "contemporary" service, it

was not even a “blended” service, it was an ill fated attempt at a “blended” service. It is a traditional service masquerading as a “contemporary” or “blended” service. Who did they develop this service for? 85% of the people in attendance were either close to retirement age or older and that is not usually the age that you start a service like this for. I dressed for a “contemporary” service with no tie and I felt undressed. If young people came to this service they would feel out of place because of the people’s attire.

Just out of curiosity I wonder if the pastor would take off his robe for this service and become a real person. That is the first thing that will need to happen before anything happens in this service. He was the same dead pan preacher that he was when I visited this churches regular service when he had just returned from a mission trip and he was “tired.” What was his excuse today? It is perfectly okay to smile and even laugh during a church service. I firmly believe that God is up in Heaven wondering what He created when he looks at our “lifeless” services. The one thing about being a Christian is that we are given a complete and exciting “NEW LIFE” why not use that new life to bring people to a new understanding of Christ? If unchurched, non-Christians come into our worship services they leave saying “Why would I want to be a part of that?” and I don’t blame them.

One thing I would do with this service is block off the last 10 pews and make the people move to the front. This makes it a more intimate service and allows for a more personal touch.

I thought that it was interesting that they had folding chairs on the platform instead of the regular service chairs for the people to sit on—I take it this is for a contemporary look?

Let me go through my entire time there:

1. When I arrived the parking lot was full and I arrived at 10:20. That is a major problem. Granted they don’t have many spaces to begin with so they need to find other places for people to park or have someone guiding traffic.
2. Not a single person even looked at me as I entered until I got to the sanctuary door and there it was an older retired couple—at a “contemporary” or “blended” service at the door? Where are the young people?
3. The praise team needs to be updated immediately. There were a couple of people who tried but they just don’t understand what they are there for—to lead in worship. The organist at the piano plays fairly well but is obviously a classical keyboardist trying to play contemporary music. This could improve with training. They might as well have not had the guitar since they didn’t play anything worthwhile and the mic on the guitar wasn’t loud enough to hear anything anyway. The drummer was okay but he could use some help also. Now the singers: it started out with 6 then during the service they lost one, then added two and eventually the one who had left earlier returned—what is that all about? They had three mics which were all in front of the females and were useless; there was no sound from them as far as I could tell. The sound people need to understand what “sound reinforcement” means. One of the people in the group was old enough that she couldn’t get up and come down to take communion. You know that I am old and I have nothing against older people but for a service that you want to appeal to the young you have to be aware of these problems and make some changes in personnel.
4. When I arrived they had just begun the choruses and I wasn’t sure if the congregation was supposed to sing or not from the way they were leading. Incidentally, I’m not sure

that the congregation knew either. It was obvious to me that someone had aired the concern about too much repetition so they did each one once and finished. The problem was that the congregation would almost begin to sing and the song would end. I usually sing a chorus three times minimum and more according to how the congregation is doing. The pianist got up to introduce some of the songs with a curt title and sat down and began playing. If that is all he is going to say he would be better off saying nothing. The group did come out into the congregation during one song which did help some. The reason that churches use words on the screen is so the people will look up instead of down at the hymnal or bulletin. The big problem here is that the praise team also continually looked at the bulletin and not into the eyes of the congregation. Leading in worship means that you look at them as a leader does. Don't close your eyes or constantly look at the bulletin. This means that the praise team needs to know the music. The music doesn't need to be memorized but it needs to be familiar to them. Music could be on stands so they don't have anything in their hands except a mic.

5. From the beginning choruses we went into a "traditional" service. There was nothing "contemporary" or even "blended" about it. The pastor did do his message from down front with minimal notes instead of behind the pulpit which I appreciated. Even with the traditional service order there was no flow to the service. They need to get rid of the Liturgy and allow some freedom in the service.

5-23-04

Went back to an Emerging church to hear the senior pastor who I didn't get to hear the first time I went—too bad—he wasn't there again today. No one even noticed me as I entered except one person who needed to use the bathroom and asked me if I was in line. I had to get my own bulletin out of a box and two people talked to me during the greeting time. Oh well so much for the new emerging church. The praise band was different this time: they had two guitars, one violin, one cello and three singers—no percussion. The voices were so loud that you couldn't hear yourself sing so the congregation didn't sing very much. They had some paintings on the wall that were really interesting. The lighting and candles make for an interesting effect. It was interesting that the leader talked about people parking in front of peoples homes and in their driveways and that the neighbors were angry. It was nice to see people with Bibles that actually knew where to find scripture.

6-26-04

Today I went to a growing ministering church—granted they minister only to their own. No one greeted me at the door—I had to ask the lady at the door for a bulletin because she was busy talking to someone else. The sanctuary (which probably holds 150 people—five services a weekend) was full—actually overflowing so the 80% principal was out the window. I think the church is building—they currently worship in a strip mall. The preacher for the day—the associate pastor—was excellent. He included what I think is the most important thing you can include in a message and that was laughter. He also made some very salient points—good stuff. This church has a lot going for it but they need to begin to look outward instead of totally inward. They need some help on the

sound. The nice thing was that they didn't blow the people out but all you could hear was the lead singer and his guitar. They had an excellent drummer who used electronic drums but you could hear him. I actually wore a suit which no one else did and no one came to greet me knowing that I was a visitor—OH WELL!!! This was a very young congregation. They took the offering while the preacher began his message—very strange. Lot's of possibilities.

8-15-04

Today I visited a church for the second time. They have just moved into a new sanctuary and I get to hear their pastor preach. The first time I went they were just beginning construction on their new sanctuary. It is now finished and they have gone from three services to one service. It's obvious that they will (already should have) soon begin another service. The church was virtually full. The parking lot was probably 90% full when I arrived.

It looks like they have some exciting ministries happening and they are not just for them but for people in the community. For instance they have an English as a second language class and interestingly enough they aren't located in an area where there are many if any people living that speak other languages. They said that they had around 100 people attending. What an exciting community outreach.

The sanctuary is beautiful, well planned—except for the choir loft which is too small—only hold 35 people. The sound was excellent and was managed very well. I was disappointed in the music director until I found out he was a substitute. Hopefully the regular one is better. Again—not a very friendly congregation. One thing that I felt was good was that there were no Bibles in the pews so the people have to carry their own—wow that is a novel idea. The pastor was excellent. His message was memorized and he presented it with a lot of energy, pizzazz and laughter. Wow—another novel idea. The choir was basically dead—there were only two ladies out of the 30 that looked like they were alive.

8-22-04

Today I visited the contemporary service at a normally traditional church today. Actually I was quite pleased in a number of ways. First of all I was pleasantly greeted at the door of the building and at the door of the sanctuary. I also had a lady in the sanctuary introduce herself and ask if I was a visitor. She was very pleasant. This is one of only a half a dozen churches where I have had this happen. WOW! Maybe there is some life left out there in the Christian community? The service was basically a contemporary service. The sanctuary was filled with a good variety of old and young people. There was no prelude it was just the praise team trying to get the sound they wanted out of the sound system.

They began with announcements about 5 minutes after the service should have begun—about half of the congregation was still in the narthex—oh well, so much for informing the people. Then the Praise Team played for about 25 minutes—let's talk about what they did. The group was quite good as far as musicianship is concerned, they just didn't know how to lead worship. They actually played with a contemporary sound;

consequently, there were many young people in the sanctuary. The sound was so loud that the people couldn't hear themselves sing which is not good. The pastor preached with a good mix of laughter and seriousness and the congregation even responded with a few amen's. It looks as though this congregation has something going.

8-29-04

Today I visited a church that is basically contemporary. Both of their services are contemporary. I arrived at the church and was greeted very nicely by the person handing out the bulletins and went to my seat in the sanctuary. It was 10:25 and it was obvious that there wasn't movement to begin the service. The pastor stopped by and greeted me. This was another time that I knew what the people would wear to church so I wore a suit and looked totally out of place- I had to be a visitor. Not another person greeted me. Oh well, at least the pastor did. There were a number of people standing around the sanctuary talking even after the service started—wish they would have left the room to talk. They used two large screen TV's to project their words which made it a little hard to read. They need to buy a projector. They had two large windows in the front which made it hard to see people if they moved in front of the window. They need to have curtains that are electric and will close when needed. The service didn't begin until 10:40—just seemed like there was no rush to get going. The service lasted until 12:25. There were still people coming into the service at 11:00. 98% young adults—I mean 40 and below with lots of children—WOW this is great. There was also a good mixture of cultures. This preacher was excellent—he was very down to earth and communicated well with laughter and joy. The praise team was pretty good—not much life. Six singers—three males, three females, two keyboards, bass guitar, trap set. The leaders need to learn how to be the leader. He wasn't bad but he was not great. The pastor greeted the visitors and said that they didn't want their (the visitors) money—why not? Oh well.

9-12-04

Today I went to a church that had a number of people greeting me at the door—an early service so not many people in the service but a full choir that was excited about what they were doing. They had a praise band which included the normal pieces as well as brass and woodwinds. This was an excellent and exciting service. Most of the choir music was in unison including their special but it was well done. The praise team was a part of the choir and moved in and out as needed. The pastor praised and thanked the choir—what a unique idea. The sound was good. They used a variety of settings in the sanctuary from video tape to different lighting and closing curtains etc. They had windows behind the pastor that made it hard to see when he preached. Excellent message.

9-19-04

The church I visited today is well past the 80% mark. I would guess that the sanctuary holds more than 750 and it was totally full. They currently have three services that are all the same—Saturday night and two on Sunday. They did have plenty of parking. They had a 40 voice choir, 40 piece orchestra and it was a Continental Singers

type of service. They had someone direct me in the parking lot, the person who gave me a bulletin was not interested in me but they did have ushers helping people find seats. They had windows off to the side so the light didn't silhouette the people on the platform. You could still see the mountains. The choir sang mostly in unison—even with the praise team holding their mics during the anthem you couldn't hear any parts. Great sound. A very exciting and worshipful service. I mean upbeat worshipful not dead.

10-3-04

Today I visited a church that a number of years ago was a growing church that was truly spreading the Good News to the world. I think they are still spreading the Good News but not with the same vigor that they once had. I was handed a bulletin and lamely greeted at the door and no one said another word to me until the greeting time in the service and after that not another person talked to me. An interesting way to recognize visitors. I was actually thinking that the people would be dressed casually so I wore a suit and most of the people wore suits. The crowd was mostly older retired people and maybe 5% were younger. This used to be a church full of young people and all of those people have either gotten older and moved away or gotten older and stayed or they have gone to be with the Lord.

When I arrived at 10:25 the sanctuary was pretty full with people sitting in their seats fellowshiping with one another but there was nothing happening to prepare the people for the coming ministry. About 10:27 the pianist moved to the piano and I thought that maybe something was going to happen but she just sat down and looked through her music. At 10:30 the choir entered from a side door in a nice orderly fashion and as soon as the director had them seated he went to a microphone and said that a certain lady was supposed to do a children's message and he was sure that she was there. She raised her hand, got up and went forward and the service began. How interesting. An interesting aspect of the speakers was that most of them sounded like they were from the south. I noticed an interesting thing in the bulletin—they used message in interesting ways. For instance: Choral Message and Vocal Message, I thought that was an interesting way to designate parts of worship. This was an interesting service. The members carried their Bibles, it makes a difference in how they act if their Bibles are important enough to bring with them. I have to admit I dislike sitting through the drivel of some anthems and hymns. They are just syrupy and are really not very creative. Oh well they may be meaningful to the people in the congregation. The choir did their best but sang totally void of feeling.

10-10-04

Wow! I finally got to visit a church that has some life and energy and preached the gospel at the same time. This is actually not the first of the more than 70 churches but it is one of the few. The Praise Band was quite good—though the singers left a little to be desired, (there was only one singer who looked interested in being there) and they actually started before it was time for the service to begin—what a shock. They had a good flow to their service music and the leader knew how to keep the flow of worship going. I was greeted with a smile outside the front door, which was a good change. The

pastor used a movie clip (the Whoopie Goldberg preacher movie) within his sermon, included laughter, time for quiet and even had a person get up and give a personal testimony. Had the announcements and offering at the end of the service—though they did use a video for the offertory which sent the people out of the sanctuary with an upbeat feeling. Very interesting.

10-17-04

Well back to the beginning of time. Another church that is dead and doesn't know that it is. Actually they had a fairly good mix of ages in the congregation but the two associates pastors that ran the service were older ladies. If this is church then I wouldn't want to go to church. This church actually had five Reverends on the staff but very little real church. The Senior Pastor didn't preach today in fact he wasn't there. The sound was so soft it was hard to hear any of the speakers. The light in the sanctuary was so dim that it felt like you were in a bar. It was actually hard to see the people on the platform.

The choir sang with a substitute director and they were less than exciting. The actually mirrored the director who was also less than exciting.

The preacher spoke from a lectern that she brought to the center of the platform and read her message—not very exciting. Her message was slanted to badmouth the people who don't take care of the poor. She gave some phony statistics about the poor—some bad statistics that she got from some Liberal think tank then built her message on that. She was saying we were starving children in the United States. Oh well, so much for truth in the church. I was greeted by one person, the person who gave me a bulletin when I came in and four people around me when we passed the peace otherwise not even a hello. In fact one of the female pastors passed me in the hall and never even looked at me.

They had a little more than 50% of the sanctuary filled. The hymns from the denominational hymnal were probably the worst I have ever heard. They said nothing, they were generally too low, and they were hard to sing. The organ prelude brought the people into the sanctuary—the people were totally quiet, and then they had announcements—I just don't understand this. Half of the congregation wasn't yet in the sanctuary. It was interesting to hear the checks being made out and torn out during the end of the message because the offering was next. This was a church where the people didn't even seem to know each other. They didn't even talk to each other. They walked out of the sanctuary with tunnel vision and to their cars and went to who knows where. What a sad commentary on Christianity.

10-24-04

This was an interesting church to go to. It definitely is a going church—I'm not really sure why, but it is packed. They have three services on Sunday morning and another service on Saturday night. Let me tell you about my experience: I drove into the parking lot at 9:25 and there were literally no parking spaces—I had to park in the fire lane—pretty exciting but not ripe for much growth. There were two visitor spaces open when I walked by, but it was too late. I was greeted at the door by a very welcoming couple and received a bulletin as I entered the sanctuary—uh oh, it was on red paper and was unreadable in the light of the sanctuary which was very dim. The sanctuary was full

so they had to set up chairs in the Narthex. As the service proceeded the pastor said that they were only going to use the red bulletins for two more weeks since the series he was using them for ended in two weeks. The only problem is I can't read this now. This is something that you always need to be aware of. Change as soon as you realize what has happened.

The service itself was both exciting and awful. The band was in place when I entered but there was no music. The pastor got up at 9:30 and made announcements which were hard to hear since there were still people coming in and talking, but he finished and we did the first hymn—a rather lifeless one at that. We then proceeded to Baptism and Communion which were very interesting. They asked the congregation to serve the person next to them and proceeded to sing a hymn during the communion—so much for trying to serve the person next to you. At the end of the communion service they prayed for the offering and began passing the offering plates while the pastor began his message. Strange. The message was good but he went on and on repeating the same thing—he could have finished in 20 minutes. Too bad. It looked like almost all of the people brought their Bibles and used them—they even took notes on the message—what a unique idea. God is definitely working in this church but they have outgrown their facilities and need to begin to plan where to go next.

10-31-04

On this Sunday I was greeted by a smiling older couple at the door and I got a bulletin from a gentleman as I entered the sanctuary. Just smiles, no greeting. Oh well so much for church. This was a church that was about half full and was filled with seniors—there were only half a dozen people below the age of 65. The pastors were close to retirement age and were as boring as that also. The choir was filled with older people and was in a word awful. They tried but they didn't know the anthem and they weren't capable of singing it. When your choir is in this condition you need to just quit having a choir. This service was supposed to be a blended service. Their praise team consisted of two lady singers, seniors, the director who sang, a guitar player who sang, and the organist. Amazing!!

The sermon was way too long by a pastor who was a ventriloquist—his lips hardly moved. He did get the congregation to laugh a couple of times, but he was boring. They did do the announcements during the service—good. A few people brought Bibles but there was never any scripture for them to look at except in the sermon and it went by so fast that no one had time to look at their Bibles. Their praise music was far from praise music—it was boring and dead. I stayed for the beginning of the contemporary service. First of all it was better than the first service—there was actually a little life. The praise team was different and better this time—still not great but better. The team consisted of two female singers, two male singers, two guitars, percussion and piano. Not bad, but there was lots of room for improvement. This service included a much younger audience than the first service and there was more life in this service. This church epitomizes why Christianity is dying. I think they think they are doing it right. Incidentally, the Senior Pastor greeted me before the 10:30 service and was rather short and abrupt—interesting guy.

11-7-04

Today I visited a relatively small and relatively young congregation. This church began in the 1980's and has gone through some interesting times and a number of pastors. I'm not sure why they have gone through so many pastors. I provided music for this church from Faith Pres for their first year. They had a college brass ensemble as guests this morning which created a different atmosphere in the sanctuary than usual I suppose. They, like many other churches, did their announcements at the beginning of the service, but unlike many other churches the congregation was in their pews to hear the announcements—probably because of the brass ensemble. I was greeted by a couple of high school students as I walked up the sidewalk and the person who handed out bulletins, not with any enthusiasm, but at least greeted. They had about 150 people in this service—the sanctuary probably holds 175 so this was a good crowd. They will need to find more room soon. There was plenty of room in the parking lot when I arrived. The pastor preached from memory and included a little laughter in his message and the congregation got involved with the laughter. There was some energy in the sanctuary, but how much of that left the sanctuary I don't know. They included the page number for the scripture in the bulletin, oh well. The choir looked dead for the most part—fortunately they sounded a little better than that.

11-21-04

Wow! What an exciting church. They have a lot of things going for them, but they also have some things that they are doing that will eventually become a problem for the church. They are close enough to Denver that they draw many people from the Denver area. They have an exciting ministerial and support staff that knows what to do in worship and in the other areas of the ministry. This is a church that attracts approximately 1600 people each weekend for worship at one Saturday night and two Sunday services. Their services are praise, joy and laughter filled. They are an Evangelical church.

The senior pastor doesn't beat around the bush; he says it straight out—how refreshing. He is a little distracting in his presentation because his is so high above the congregation that he keeps bending down to get on their level—I would prefer that he come down off of the platform and be on the level of the congregation.

Let's start at the very beginning. As I drove up to the church it was obvious that they didn't have enough parking. Except for a few spaces to the east of the education buildings there were only three handicap parking spaces open. People were parking on the street in the fields etc. They need more parking badly. As I entered the building I forced two people to say hello to me not one other person did. I don't care if they know that I am a visitor they should say hello to everyone. They have three nice new out buildings that are education and office buildings and a nice courtyard to the east of the main building. All of these buildings are relatively new—three or four years. They have a coffee house downstairs where many people were congregated when I arrived—lots of fellowship, but no one talked to me. I had to get my bulletin from a young man who was

probably 8 or 9 years old and I had to walk up to him and ask him for it. I would say the average age of this congregation is 40. They have a very nice visitor area but there was no one there either before or after the service. There was no one greeting you at the door. I sat in the sanctuary for 20 minutes before the service started with people walking past me, talking to people around me and not one person even looked at me let alone talked to me. Oh well so much for the Christian spirit. The sanctuary is not well designed for the platform—the praise band is on one side and fifty to seventy five feet away on the other side is the choir—not a good situation as far as I'm concerned. This obviously included some poor planning. The praise band is outstanding and the choir of 40 people, average age probably 30, is also excellent and full of energy and excitement. Almost everything they did was in unison except for the anthem and that was in two part—too bad you have all of this talent and restrict them to doing nothing. The sound in the sanctuary is excellent except when any of the choir members sang solos with the choir and praise band—they were hard to hear. The sanctuary with probably 1000 seats has moveable chairs—this space could be used in a variety of different configurations. They have very long services—an hour and a half to an hour and forty five minutes. They had some scripture during the message but no one opened their Bible. I didn't hear any complaints, nor did I see people looking at their watches. They had communion with about eight different locations around the sanctuary where people could go to partake—they had the people come from the back row first to the front—it worked quite well. They also took communion to people who couldn't get up and get it.

1-2-05

On this first Sunday of 2005 I visited an evening church service at an Emerging church. This is definitely a different church, but a church that is ministering to the exact people Jesus said needed ministering too—the people that are down and out and don't know where they are going or who to talk to.

They begin with a potluck at 6:00 and church at 7:00 so people begin eating and then just migrate over with their food to the service. There are lots of young people (20's) with a smattering of older people. They really do know how to worship—probably in my top five churches. There is lots of laughter throughout the evening which is very important to any church. There were not any greeters at the door because when I arrived they were all eating, but there was a warm feeling. During the service there was constant movement in and out like a young people's concert. The service was one hour long—began with three songs by an excellent band and singers and then gave announcements and then went to the message. The service ended with communion and one song.

They are talking about beginning a morning service which from what I understand will be in a bar. That sounds great to me—what better place.

1-9-05

Today I visited one of the most exciting churches I have visited to date with respect to welcoming people to the church. They had plenty of other problems, but when I arrived at their front door and all the way into the sanctuary I felt very welcome. I was greeted at the outside door, in the narthex and by an usher in the sanctuary. Wow a

church that knows how to welcome people, I wasn't sure that there were any of those left. Now let's get to the nitty gritty. This church has three services, two of them are full to the brim and the third is about two thirds full which in itself is wonderful. First of all I'm not sure how many of those people are there because they are Christians and how many are there because that is what I have done for ever. The first two services are traditional and are filled with people who average in age around sixty. In fact at the end of the service they brought walkers with wheels down the aisles during the final hymn so the aged people could leave before the crowd began to leave. Interesting! The choir—60 singers—sang an anthem that should only be used as a concert piece, it certainly didn't minister. Don't get me wrong they did a nice job on the piece but it just isn't a worship piece in 2005. The congregation didn't sing at all because they sang hymns out of the denominational hymnal which are unsingable for the most part. All of the prayers were read—they had lots of unison readings that were read half heartedly at best and the pastor's sermon could have been given anyplace—it was bad and boring.

These mainline denominations bad mouth the more evangelical denominations, but I can't imagine going to this church each Sunday and coming out with any kind of Christian faith. I might want to help the sick and the poor but even non-Christians do that.

The third service was a contemporary service—the band and singers were great—the sound crew needs to learn about sound reinforcement, but the group was very good. This service had some younger people but it also had some older people—there were probably more older people than younger people. The pastor preached the same message here that he did in the other services so he is not adapting to a different audience. They did use the screen for all services. He is trying to begin an Emerging church style for one service. Hope it works because in a few years the church will be gone even though they are full now.

Let's talk about parking!! There is no parking—the people have to park on the street or in the parking lots of the local businesses and walk. This church is in a very formal university town, so people go to the more traditional church.

1-16-05

Now we are starting to find out what worship really is—we still have a problem with parking and welcoming—but these people sure know how to worship. They have 12,000 members, probably 10,000 people at church this morning including the children. The service began with one hour of praise music, then the pastor gave announcements and talked about the Easter program and how he wanted the people to pray for changed lives coming out of the program, and then we proceeded to the guest speaker from Nigeria. The service lasted two hours.

As I walked down the hall to the sanctuary I saw at least 50 computer sites where parents could check in their children for Sunday school and dozens of rooms and areas for Sunday school classes. They had all kinds of things that children could do. Going on to the sanctuary I found that the sanctuary was in the round—a church after my own heart. In the round you have everyone closer to the action. In the lobby around the sanctuary are many tables that are promoting their ministries in a variety of different ways. They also have a coffee shop and plenty of tables and chairs for people to sit and communicate with each other. Wow, what a great way to build community. They had a

large welcome center just outside of the sanctuary and one at the door that I entered. They have loads of information for visitors. There are dozens of small group activities outlined in a 144 page book. In the sanctuary they have plenty of ushers to help you find a seat, but no one greeted me until I got to the sanctuary door. The music portion included a light and smoke show and then the regular lights came up for the message. They have 4 or 5 screens like an arena. The Praise Team was wonderful and led us into the message beautifully. This is a Pentecostal church no doubt. The parking is horrendous—this is a fairly new facility. A lady at the visitors center said with the regular chairs they can seat 7400 and with folding chairs they can seat 8000. They can also take out the chairs and set up tables for dinner theater—amazing.

1-23-05

Today I visited a church that has been dying for 13 years and doesn't know it. This is the entire tenure of the pastor who just left. When he arrived the church had a membership of 1350 people and when he left 13 years later they have less than 700 on the rolls. There were probably 100 less people in the sanctuary this morning than there were the last time I went—three years ago. The service was dead!!! to say the least and the people are aging. Quite honestly I received the best greeting at this church that I have gotten at any church. I got hugs.

They sang one hymn, so much for congregational involvement, and the rest of the music was the choir director organist show. All of the music centered on the Director of Music and the organist, and the organist still plays with two left hands. They have done away with the praise team so this is no longer a blended service, but the sign out front says “blended.” The pastor for the day was the retired part-time pastor who was there for his last Sunday. He is an amazing pastor and preacher so the message was great, but the music was the ladies in the choir who sang a lifeless rendition of Pie Jesu. How sad. Hopefully they will be able to get a new pastor soon or they will be in real trouble.

2-13-05

Wow! What a pleasure to visit a church that is really alive. This morning I visited a church that seems to be growing, has a wonderfully alive worship service with the entire congregation involved and a minister who speaks to the people instead of above the people. He even prays like I pray—like God is right there with him. It did disappoint me that they only had a CD playing up to the hour that the service began. In my opinion the praise team should play at least 5 minutes before the service. The praise team came in right on time and began the service at 9:30 sharp. That's good!! It is not usually true in contemporary services. The praise team was excellent.

Let's start at the very beginning a very good place to start: There were plenty of parking spaces. There was a greeter at the door, a greeter in the Narthex and an usher with a bulletin inside the sanctuary. I felt greeted. It seemed like there was plenty of life and energy. The people were generally talking to each other and didn't see someone from the outside come in. Oh well. No one at the visitors table—in fact I'm not sure that there was a visitors table. The people entered the sanctuary in the last 3 minutes. The sanctuary was probably 90% full. The rows (chairs) were too close together—it was hard to get

through even without people in the chairs. The service was 1. music, 2. offering with music, 3. music, 4. sermon, 5. communion with music and music to end the service. The service lasted about 1 hour and 10 minutes. Excellent message and prayer by the pastor he had the people read with him as he read scripture in his message and he prayed like God was right in the room—very personal. I would guess the average age was 40. There was a good mix of ages. From their “Six Priorities” it looks like they are introspective rather than going out to the world. This is just an assumption on my part. They do seem to be a very active church.

3-7-05

What fun! A black church that is totally mainline except in their style of worship. They are even more traditional than any of the traditional mainline churches I have attended, but they do get with it when it comes to worship. They sing with energy, and respond to everything that is going on with energy, but they have all of the trappings of a mainline church, and all of the responsive readings etc. that the mainline church would have. They know how to worship!!!

Some problems: they don't have any off street parking; their sanctuary is very small (probably holds 100 people or less; there is no room for expansion in their present location; they are basically an old congregation with very few whites; it looks like they don't do much outreach, but they do seem to take care of themselves; they had a problem with the flow of the service because people forgot what they were supposed to do at times.

Some real positives: they greet you (with enthusiasm) at the door; they greeted me in the sanctuary before the service started; the sanctuary is filled with smiling faces; they honor their own; the service was an hour and fifty minutes long and nobody was ready to leave; the service went so fast that you didn't realize what time it was; they included lots of music that the congregation SANG; the sermon was only 25 minutes long and included the use of people in the congregation reading scripture—WOW—my kind of guy. Overall it was an interesting and exciting experience.

3-27-05

This morning I visited a mainline church that is getting smaller number wise, but they still have a little bit of life. The pastor is very dynamic (he probably won't be at this church very long) and knows the people very well (so he won't be able to minister to a much larger church). The people are somewhat welcoming but the welcomer's are all quite old. In fact most of them are people who were older than I am. A note of interest is that they don't have the name of the church anywhere in the bulletin.

I visited on Easter Sunday so there were many of the once or twice a year people there. One large family that only a wife goes to the church were there to dedicate a carillon in there husband/father's name. The minister actually preached a “minister to the world message”—I'm not sure if that is the normal way or if it was an Easter Sunday message. This is basically an older congregation that is just slowly dying. The choir consists of the same people that have been in the choir for years. They don't currently have a choir director and I understand why—the organist is awful.

4-17-05

If this is church then we had better find a new way to do church. Actually we have but this church obviously hasn't found it yet. They have no parking—there are two other churches that meet in this building so they give services each Sunday and nobody comes to any of them. This was the contemporary or the less formal service. It definitely wasn't contemporary. They sang hymns with two ladies and the pastor up front leading—poorly I might add. There were 17 people at this service and what an interesting bunch. There weren't any families just a bunch of singles—interesting. They are a welcoming church. The pastor is Asian and I think he is ok but he is hard to understand. They did use a screen to project the words and other things so they are at least thinking a little contemporary. Last Sunday they had 15 people at their traditional service and 10 at their less formal service. How sad.

5-1-05

I have to quit visiting churches—the more I visit the more I realize that the Christian faith is in dire need of changes and soon. This was a church whose pastor was down in Colorado Springs picketing against James Dobson's and left a church, which doesn't have any idea what church is all about to fend for themselves.

I parked in front of the church 15 minutes before the service was to begin and there was not a sign of life—in fact there wasn't any sign of life for about 5 minutes when a car pulled up behind me and two people got out and went into the church. Just for information I had already checked out their parking lot in the back which had parking for 6 or 7 cars so where would the people be parking?

Well at 10:25 (the service begins at 10:30) I went into the church. There were two people standing talking—I found out later that one was an usher—so I tried to find a bulletin. In all honesty I didn't recognize the bulletin on the table because the cover looked like it was done by a child and it was poorly printed, so the lady quit talking for a second and gave me one. She immediately went back to her talking. Oh well. I went in and sat down—there were maybe ten people in the sanctuary and they were all standing around talking to each other—no one bothered to greet me—this is the way you get visitors to return.

This is a church that you would consider a downtown church—an old church with mostly old members and homeless people. The service was rather interesting—the music was: Gathering Music *The Lusty Month of May*, Musical Meditation *Joy Spring*, Offering Music *The Heather on the Hill*, *The Rose*, a couple of denominational hymns—not singable and with words that said nothing—thank heavens they ended with How Great They Are or I wouldn't have known that it was a Christian Church. The message was titled Flower Meditation where an old guy stood up and told us to look into the flower (oh by the way, we were all given a flower) and as you inhale it was supposed to get brighter and as you exhaled it was supposed to get darker. The old guy's wife (she had a flower ring around her head) stood next to him and played an Orff drum throughout

the reading. It actually was rather amusing. And not one person said a thing to me as I left the church. Would I ever return again? NO WAY—not only because of the service but they certainly weren't friendly. Need I say more? If this is church then God doesn't need it.

5-15-05

Today I visited a church that one of my former students told me she was going to in January. She said that they were having problems and didn't know how long they were going to be around. After visiting the church I find that she was absolutely right and it seems like they should already be gone. The church meets in a warehouse. It's a fairly small space—probably holds 100 people max. When I arrived I was greeted heartily at the door and I told them that I was there because of my former student. The lady at the door said that my former student just happened to be sick that day (remember this fact).

Well I proceeded into the sanctuary—time 8:57—the praise team was practicing—they're not bad musically. A couple of minutes later they finished saying that they were running out of time—I guess it was already time for the service to begin. There were 17 people in the sanctuary at this time so we started the service. The leader of the praise team read a scripture and said "Let's sing." The praise team leader has no idea how to lead worship. Within the next half hour another 33 people moseyed into the sanctuary. During the first 30 minutes we sang and had a 10 minute welcoming time where all of the people got together with their friends and had a good time. This is not what I would consider a welcoming time more like a social club time—is that what the church is? The preacher came on and preached a sermon about getting along with each other and how he was praying that the congregational meeting that was happening during the 11:00 service would provide some common ground and a little compromise. The service ended with the person making the announcements telling the congregation that he was resigning his position on the elder board—not sure why. What a downer for a visitor.

That afternoon I sent an email to the former student and she replied that same day saying that she had given them her letter of resignation from the church five weeks earlier—hmm, interesting, they said that she was sick. It's obvious that this is a very sick church which probably needs to close down and those people need to find other churches. We'll see what God has in mind. I'll keep track.

5-22-05

Today I visited a church that other churches need to emulate, but not many will. The mainline churches would call them a circus church just like they called a church that I used to be the Minister of Music in and would write them off. Oh well, this church is growing Christian witnesses who are going out and ministering to the world. There must be something wrong with that. This church is the second church of a church planting group and they are currently working on number three. Wow! They welcomed me in the parking lot by guiding me to a parking space. In reality they opened the church in a location that doesn't have enough parking so it has been a real problem since they opened. They are running over 2400 at the five services they have each weekend. There are two services on Saturday night and three on Sunday morning (actually they have 5

services on Sunday morning—watch for my visit to The Upper Room where they have two services that are part of the main service). They welcomed me at the door, inside the Narthex and at the sanctuary door. The only thing that they didn't do was thank me for coming at the end of the service. Oh well they can't do everything.

Their service is full of life and energy. This morning they had a youth group that danced to a Contemporary Christian song and signed another one. They have an excellent praise band but their worship leader is a “start.” He is a one man show which is the only thing that troubles be about this church. They are church that reaches out and ministers to the community, the state, the United States and to the world. They even tell their people to give a certain portion of their giving to other ministries and not to the church. What a unique concept.

This is a church that other churches should visit to see what church really is.

5-29-05

Today I visited a mainline church that is there but probably not alive. They have just let a pastor go who just created havoc in the church and are trying to get it back together again. They are a very old congregation who doesn't know how to minister to people. They have a very nice Interim minister who is a long time mainliner who did well back in the 50's, 60's and 70's but is way outdated for 2005. Their choir director does a good job but I think she is also living in the dark ages—not sure about that. Take a look at the congregation during the service and you will know where they are—they are totally bored. The need to come into the 21st century or they certainly won't attract any new people. They have a little room to grow parking wise for one service, but have a lot of room to grow if they added another service. 90 people in the service today. This was a normal traditional service—what a sleeper.

7-2-05

Today's church was a church that I have visited a number of times before but today I visited their service in the Upper Room. What a unique title. Hmm. I wonder where they came up with that name? Well, this is a service that is in a room above the building next door to their sanctuary. It's actually above some businesses in the shopping center where the church resides. This church is amazing in many ways: First of all and most notably their entrepreneurship and creativity. When they begin something new they seem to really study all of the implications of this new idea and are ready to do what ever it takes to make it happen. They have obviously invested a lot of time and money in this enterprise and it has really paid off for the Lord—isn't that what this church thing is about in the first place? They have 28 (I think) round tables in this room, which seat eight people and are covered with table cloths neatly set, and 12 screens for people to see the service. They have a coffee bar at the back of the room that is available before and after the service and people definitely use it.

I have to admit there is one thing that I personally don't like about the church service and that is that the praise team is not a team it is a band with one singer, a one person show and I think that it is easier to get people to sing when you have more singers.

It's the same in the main sanctuary where they also have a one person show when the choir is not there and the people don't sing very well if they sing at all.

Now let's talk about the people who attend this service. I admit I expected the age group to be 20's and 30's, but I was pleasantly surprised—there were people there from elementary school to at least one 86 year old and they were all getting into the music and making a joyful noise for the Lord. What a fun time in Christ.

The service begins with the Praise Team providing music and some announcements and then the message is piped in from the main sanctuary. Since there are so many screens you feel like the message is happening right from the front of the room and not from someplace else. It felt very comfortable as you introduced yourself around the table and answered the question they had for the morning which tied into the message. The message for the morning was based on Ephesians 4:11 & 12a; "*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, ...*" NIV The word *service* here refers to all Christians needing to become ministers, finding their place in the ministry and actively carrying out their call. If every church taught this message Christianity would be second to none in this world.

Like the few churches that are thriving in the Colorado this church had a greeter at the outside door, another greeter at the sanctuary door and people to help you find a place to sit. Was the place full? Yes, it was more than full with an alive and vibrant group of Christians, first time visitors and maybe even some people who hadn't yet accepted the Lord as their personal savior. When I left that church I knew that it was a place where I would feel comfortable anytime.

7-17-05

Today was a tough day for me—I visited a church that I had once been the minister of music at and it is very difficult to see it in the condition it is in today. Granted, it wasn't in very good shape when I left, but it was better than it is today. This was my first time back since I left almost five years ago. There were 34 people in sanctuary including the organist and the minister and only a few of those were much alive. I was not greeted in the parking lot, at the front door or as I entered the sanctuary. The bulletins were on a stand next to the sanctuary door and my granddaughter and I took the last two. The problem was that a few more people entered from that door after us—oops no bulletins.

There was pleasant organ music playing when we arrived a good way to start worship. There were people of a number of ages from probably 45 to 70 but there was not much life. The hymns were slow or slower and were traditional hymns which didn't speak to the people in attendance. The church has gone back to the old style of worship with not much excitement or energy. The pastor preached a fairly good sermon but there was no response from the congregation. Even when he said something that would elicit laughter I was the only person who laughed. They had a duet provided from an outside group and they weren't bad they just kept singing the same thing over and over with the same bland harmony and they only used one mic with the young man leaning in closer than the girl so he quite often was the only one you could hear. The problem was that he was usually singing the harmony.

This is a church building that had fallen into some disrepair and the new pastor has decided that the building repair is more important than building a congregation. Too bad!! They are using money from the foundation which had grown over the last few years of my tenure and I guess they are hoping that a building that is redone will draw a crowd. We all know that that is not going to happen. Oh well, so much for the church. Just keep praying.

7-25-05

The church I visited today was in Ft. Worth, TX. This is a “planting church” which plans to plant 62 churches this year. I have seen their website and have seen what they are doing and I am totally impressed. I just wanted to see what the home church did. They are a church of 3000 and average 2500 in attendance for their four weekend services (one Saturday night and three on Sunday morning). This is a church that is a 5 in every way except greeting a first time visitor. They greeted us and guided us in from the parking lot, (which may need to be a little bigger, because their Sunday services are at 9:00, 10:15 and 11:30 and the lot is full) at the front door, the door of the sanctuary and in the sanctuary. I realize that in a church that has 500 in attendance it is hard for the people to know who the visitors are—I usually go in an outfit that is completely opposite of what the church would wear, but today I had to go like the parishioners since I didn’t have a suit to wear.

The first thing I noticed was the blocking off of about 100 seats that (I would guess that they could seat 600) were in the back of the sanctuary so no one would sit there unless there was a need, and eventually there was a need. It immediately made the people sit closer to the platform. The praise team (with a director who was pretty bald—gosh an older guy leading worship in a “young” church? Unheard of) was excellent and the flow of the service was amazing. The band transitioned from one song to the next very well and the next person who was up was always in place and ready to do what was up next. Four of the five singers kept their eyes open at all time and the one who didn’t only closed his eyes once. WOW!!! So many praise team singers become introspective, close their eyes and sing to themselves instead of leading the members of the congregation with continual eye contact. Can you imagine the pastor closing his/her eyes during the sermon? All of the praise songs were singable and in good ranges with excellent, meaningful words. The only thing I had a problem with was the volume of the instruments. It was so loud that it was hard to hear the singer’s and worship leader’s words. They used three different video segments that were locally done and were very professional in look.

I would say the congregation’s average age was somewhere around 30 to 35 and my guess is that the oldest people there were in their 50’s. This was a church that anyone would be welcome in and where a wide variety of ministries are happening for all ages as well as other local, nationwide and worldwide ministries.

We will be happy to send you a list of all of the churches that were visited. Just send an email to: info@thekenjohnsongroup.com

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The following is a list of all of the churches that
The Phantom Pew Sitter
visited between the years of 2002 and 2005.

Assembly of God

Aurora First Assembly of God

American Baptist

Calvary Baptist

Crossroads Church

First Baptist Church of Denver

Bible Churches

Foothills Bible Church

Conservative Baptist

Mission Hills Church

Galilee Baptist

Southern Baptist

Riverside Baptist

Mississippi Avenue Baptist

Central Baptist-Aurora

Arapahoe Road Baptist

Community of Grace Church

Black Churches

Shorter Community A.M.E.

New Hope Baptist

Macedonia Baptist

People's Presbyterian

Catholic

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Queen of Peace-Aurora

Christian

South Suburban Christian

Congregational

First Plymouth Congregational

Covenant

Centennial Covenant

Emerging Churches

Pathways Church

Scum of the Earth

Episcopal

St. Johns Episcopal

Evangelical Free

Bethany Evangelical Free

Southern Gables

Independent/Non-denominational

Grace Chapel
Heritage Christian Center
Colorado Community-Englewood
Colorado Community-Aurora
Vinyard-Aurora
Orchard Road Christian Center
Calvary Temple-Denver
Crossroads Church of Denver
Faith Bible Chapel-Arvada
The Church in the City-Denver
West Bowles Community Church
Jubilee Fellowship Church
New Life Church – Colorado Springs
Eastern Hills Community Church
Green Valley Church
Northwood Church

Lutheran, Evangelical (ELCA)

Augustana Lutheran
Bethany Lutheran
Christ the Savior Lutheran
Lord of the Hills Lutheran
St. Paul’s Lutheran-Denver

Lutheran, Missouri Synod

Ascension Lutheran

Methodist, Free

Light and Life Community Church

Methodist, United

Trinity Methodist
First United Methodist-Grand Junction
St. Andrew Methodist-Littleton
Grace United Methodist-Denver
Smokey Hill United Methodist
Littleton United Methodist
Park Hill United Methodist
Hope United Methodist
Northglenn United Methodist
Warren United Methodist
St. Paul’s United Methodist

Nazarene

Denver First Church of the Nazarene

Presbyterian, Evangelical

Cherry Creek Presbyterian
Cherry Hills Community
Greenwood Community Church

Faith Presbyterian-Aurora
Parker Presbyterian
Grace Point Community-Littleton
Bear Creek Presbyterian
Lookout Mountain Community Church
Presbyterian, UPCUSA
Corona Presbyterian
Wellshire Presbyterian Church
Aurora First Presbyterian Church
Central Presbyterian
First Presbyterian Church-Ft. Lupton
Columbine Presbyterian Church
Montview Presbyterian
First Presbyterian-Grand Junction
First Presbyterian Church-Boulder
St. James Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Englewood
Presbyterian Church of the Covenant
Reformed Church in America
Christ Community Church
New Hope Community Church
Seventh Day Adventist
Palisade Seventh Day Adventist
United Church of Christ
Columbine United Church
Rockland Community Church

July 24, 2005 -- 86 churches attended

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