

The Husbands Chair – April 2006

'I know I'm welcome here'

It was just an ordinary chair but it said so much.
I hadn't realised its significance until I was well and truly inside.
There it was, unobtrusively plonked in the corner, and with newspapers to boot.

I'm not a great one for craft shops - they're not my scene.
(Bunnings would never be defiled with a crochet section).
But mention cross-stitch or quilts and my wife gives extra meaning to 'infatuated'.
This brings me back to the chair.

On holidays my wife and I were found loitering outside a craft shop.
With resistance at a very low ebb I followed her inside.
That's when I saw the chair.
The sign above it left the intention beyond doubt - "Husband's Chair".
And on the chair lay the 'Herald' and the 'Australian'.
Immediately I gave this store owner 10 out of 10 for some brilliant marketing.

Lesley was happily scouting for that elusive fabric whilst I read.
I was as happy as a dog with two tails.

I wonder what the conversation was like leading up to the chair's installation.
Did the owner see wives urging frightened husbands to enter the shop to no avail?
Had the owner witnessed a succession of men lose the will to live once inside?
Whatever the reason they had put themselves in the place of the other and, as a
result, they had come up with a winner.

Some weeks later I was in a church for an outreach service.
A quick check inside revealed a complete absence of a 'Husband's Chair'.
Not that one would want the place littered with the Herald or the Australian.
Sadly, there was also an absence of another kind.
Only those who were regular members would find anything of interest.
It seemed that no one had put themselves 'in the place of the other'.

It's easy to look down our noses at those who apply selected marketing or business
methods to church life. Yet honest business people, those who trade with integrity,
have worked out a simple self-evident truth.

Namely, we must be willing to put ourselves in the shoes of others and ask "What is it
like for them?" If we persist in running Guest Services, or inviting people to special
Outreach Services, we will have to work harder and do them better.

There has to be a determined effort on the part of all concerned to clearly demonstrate that we are willing to go out of our way to make visitors welcome.

The extra effort to be genuinely hospitable could be demonstrated in:

- the quality of the refreshments on offer *before* the meeting as well as after
- the genuine interest we take in new people
- the words we use in our meetings
- the self explanatory literature provided, etc. etc

Our new Evangelism Ministries website has a number of "How to" articles designed to help Christians in this area. Check out www.evangelismministries.org.au for further assistance.

You won't find the design of a 'Husband's Chair' there but, hopefully, some of the ideas generated will make the next Guest Service more user friendly. After all wouldn't it be nice if visitors were able to say 'I know I'm welcome here!'

