

Retail Analogies: Managing the Threshold

Every church has a physical threshold. If the approach can be either like the castle with the drawbridge up or the barrier free shopping centre entry point, then the threshold might be your portcullis or your open doors. It is the point of entry which, when you step over it, you are on church territory.

Consider a new building that you have entered recently. What attracted you over the threshold? Was it some need to access the services that were being offered on the other side? Were you clear about what was on offer and that it was something you needed? Were you invited by someone else? Now think of all those things in the context of the church building with which you are familiar.



St Peter's Box Hill minimised its threshold to show that it was "open for business" during the week. Photo Andrew Lloyd

In their book, *Buildings for Mission*, Nigel Walter and Andrew Mottram remind us that, "shops traditionally make themselves approachable by using their shop window to display on the outside something of what you can expect to find inside—not only the product, but (when skilfully done) also something of the other supposedly "lifestyle benefits you will attain" if you purchase. "Successful retail space minimises the initial threshold." Once you're across it you are free to look around and won't be asked to make a decision until you're ready."

So how much of a barrier is your physical threshold at your church? What would people see as they step across? Remember the words of Jesus, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13: 34-35)

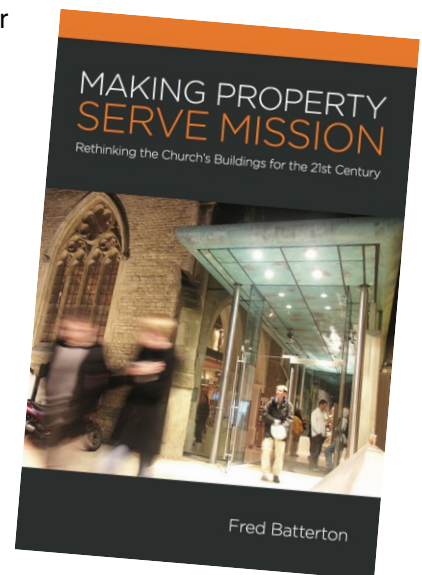
I suggest that seeing people enjoying each other's company, concerned for one another's needs and being in relationship might be visible across our threshold. The foyer café is a good start in making this openly visible from the street if you have a street frontage.

If you are creating a new building, where should the threshold be located? if most people will arrive by car do we simply locate the building and its entry point behind the car park which separates the building from the street? The retail analogy here is of an out-of-town or "homemaker style" retail centre which lures people to its doors by giant signage and advertised reputation. The cars are parked in the equivalent of the castle moat if you are someone passing by. You can't see in without the commitment of driving in and parking.

Given the opportunity it is better to have a threshold which is visible from the street together with another entry point conveniently located for people coming from the car park. The foyer might connect these two entrances. The open and transparent Street entry is principally there to offer a sense of welcome to strangers.

Another means of managing the threshold is to provide access to other activities in addition to those of church. Goodlife in Budrim, Qld and Door Of Hope in Launceston, Tas have a gymnasium and other facilities on the church site. Promotion works both ways for church and other activities. Coming across the threshold is natural and has resulted in many in the wider community finding faith.

Next time: The Largest Retail Chain with the Gospel as its Product



Fred Batterton's new book, "Making Property Serve Mission " will be available from 22 November 2016. More details next time.

