



Fewer People In The Pew?

by Sharon Hall, Director of Administration, Conway Management Company

Why is it important to listen to customers?

They can tell you that they want or need various products or services, different colors or sizes; they can tell you when they receive the wrong order, or that it arrived too late or that it did not meet their expectations. They can tell you that your prices are too high, or provide good value for the money. When they provide this feedback, either verbally or in their buying patterns, it is important to listen. But what happens when we miss the early clues and the customer simply goes to the competition — just drops off our radar. How do we then find out what our customers really think and feel about our products or services? What can we do to learn about the problems and troubles (waste), determine which actions to take to solve the problems and see new opportunities? Armed with this information we are better able to please and retain current customers and hopefully, win back former customers.

Take the case of a church. The church operates in a growing community, in a relatively healthy economic climate. Nevertheless, the church finds itself in a financial crisis. Every week the church Bulletin (newsletter) publishes the amount of the offertory collection for the previ-

ous week. The dollar amount is decreasing and has been decreasing for the last year. As a matter of fact, the weekly collection (results measure) has decreased from about \$7,200 per week to less than \$5,000 per week. It also appears that attendance is down, but hard facts and data are tough to come by. What is this telling the clergy and members of the church? Questions the church members and clergy might want answered include:

- Are the same people (customers) giving less money?
- How does attendance affect the weekly collection?
- Who are our customers (members, parishioners, attendees, community)?
- If fewer people are attending services at our church, where are the people (customers) going? To the competition? Other churches of the same faith or different faiths?
- Why aren't they (the customers) attending (buying) our services?
- If people are leaving, which customers are leaving? Are we giving the people what they want and need spiritually? Are our services inclusive of both adults and young families? Do we have extra curricular activities such as youth basketball, senior nights or other

things which our competitors (other churches) may be offering?

- Are our services held at convenient times? Are the clergymen and women available to our congregation?
- How many people (customers) do we have? How many are attending church regularly?

The above items contribute to how often and regular the attendance at the church will be, how people value the service the church provides and what the weekly offertory collection will be. For the last year and perhaps prior to that, the customers have been speaking with their pocket-books and their feet.

In this particular case, one way for the church to find out what is happening with the congregation is to do a confidential customer survey. If the church is prepared to ask questions and listen to how people feel, they can see more clearly the issues they are dealing with, and identify action plans.

The above is a true story of one of our local churches that has decided to do a customer survey with Conway Management. We will publish the results in a future newsletter so you can see what the church learned and how they are going to use that information to better serve their customers and the community.