

**Musselburgh Baptist Church
Oaks of Righteousness
*Growing Others***

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James 1:19 Be swift to hear and slow to speak.(KJV)

This study has been developed from data gathered in a community survey undertaken by Musselburgh Baptist Church during 2006. Through the survey, we were seeking to foster a greater awareness of our neighbours in order to help us as a Church become more responsive towards “growing others” as outlined in our mission statement based on Isaiah 61. The survey asked our neighbours questions about their understanding and beliefs regarding issues of spirituality, life and the community we live in. An overview of the questions and some results are provided as an appendix.

The study itself is about discussing what we can do in response to the community as revealed by the survey rather than a detailed analysis of the results. It is divided into three sections, namely.

1. Learning to Listen part 1
2. Learning to Listen part 2
3. Learning to Speak

In all of our discussions it is imperative that we remember that the information gathered was from real people who are literally our neighbours. We honour them for being so forthright and honest in their responses and pray that this study will respect the trust they offered us.

Learning to Listen (part 1) (What the survey tells us about ourselves)

The basis of this discussion is that the answers given by those surveyed reveal as much about us as it does about them. In this study we are seeking to hear what their response says about us and the Church and then think about what we can do about it. (A note of warning. It would be very easy for this to end up being a finger pointing exercise but that would not be helpful to anyone. Rather, discussing our own part to play and what we ourselves can do to change is entirely appropriate.)

Task: Read the following summaries and consider the questions.

About the Church

Of the 75 people surveyed, 83% went to Church as Children and 11% are still regularly attending. 100% of those over 61 went to Church as children. 84% of those 31-60, and only 54% of those under 30. When it comes to those still attending regularly 25% of both the older and younger age groups attend (note, some of the younger still attend because they are still living at home), whereas only 4% of the middle ages attend Church.

Belief in God

Consider the above figures and contrast them with the figures regarding belief in God. 65% of all those interviewed believe in God with 83% of those over 61, 67% of those in the middle ages and 42% of the younger participants. (Note that “God” was not necessarily defined as the “Christian God”)

More about the Church

People spoke quite freely about their attitude to Church with many positive and negative comments. The following statements are a glimpse of the negative opinions that were gathered. Again look at these in respect to what it says about us.

“I’ve outgrown my need of Church”,
“No longer seems relevant”
“Church doesn’t necessarily bring you closer to God”
“Having to give money”
“Find some supernatural aspects weird”
“Boring sermon”
“Unkind and picky Christians”
“Being expected to be there every week”
“Double standards”
“Opinions forced on you”
“Fitting into the lifestyle”
“Lost faith in the church ”

Yet more about the Church

Although there were many negative comments towards the Church, over 80% of people believe that the church has a place in the community. In saying this, people identified that communities “Need that spiritual input that church provides” and that church “Is a collective group trying to make the world a better place”. It was also noted that Church...“Can help your marriage in ways a rugby club can’t!”

About the Community

Most people (83%) think that a sense of community is important but are too busy for neighbours. People however note that the Church does things for the community that others don’t.

Gender Issues

We didn’t ask about the roles of men and women but we did discover that Men are less likely to take an interest in spiritual things. For instance, 89% of women say they have a spiritual side and only 77% men. When it comes to God, 75% of women believe but only 52% of men. Similarly in prayer it is 75 to 52 in favour of women.

Review the above areas and answer the following.

1. What is your impression of what people were saying about us as a Church?
2. Do you think people trust the Church and Christians? Is this an important thing to establish?
3. What do you think the Lord might be saying to us about our attitude, influence, style of ministry and focus through their answers?
4. What is God’s purpose for the Church? Consider Eph 5:26-27; Matt 28:19,20; Rom 12:1-21

Take some time to pray through all of this.

- Prayers of repentance,
- Prayers seeking Gods understanding and wisdom
- Prayers for our neighbours and friends and the people of our community.