

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

1970

An Analysis of the Work of the Coffee House Ministry

Randy Maxwell

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Maxwell, Randy, "An Analysis of the Work of the Coffee House Ministry" (1970). *Honors Theses*. 298.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/298

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORK OF
THE COFFEE HOUSE MINISTRY

A Thesis
Presented to
Dr. Cecil Sutley
Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Honors Program

by
Randy Maxwell
Spring 1970

THE COFFEE HOUSE MINISTRY

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Poem
- B. Definition

II. COMMUNITY COFFEE HOUSES

- A. Purpose
- B. Encounter
 - 1. Casual Confrontation
 - 2. Group Encounter
 - 3. Group-life Theology
 - 4. Public Witness
 - 5. Night People

III. COLLEGE COFFEE HOUSE

- A. Location
- B. Menues
- C. Customers
- D. Staff
- E. Programs
- F. Purposes

IV. LOCAL CHURCH COFFEE HOUSE

- A. Training Program
 - 1. First Session
 - 2. Second Session
 - 3. First Rehearsal
 - 4. Third Session
 - 5. Fourth Session
 - 6. Second Rehearsal
 - 7. Fifth Session
 - 8. Sixth Session
 - 9. Third Rehearsal
- B. Closing Remarks

V. CONCLUSION

THE COFFEE HOUSE MINISTRY

With a handful of kids
And the coffee house itch--
Alive to mission--
It's happening,
Happening all over...
From Maine to California.

A few tables, a few chairs,
A lenter, a lamp,
And a candle or two.
In a barn, a basement,
A store downtown.

With a flash of light
On a three-legged stool--
A strumming guitar
And a singer or two.

And suddenly, you're
Where the action is!
It's the place to be
On a Saturday night...
Or Friday, after the game.

To sit around
Have a Coke,
A cup of coffee--
Scribble on the menue
And meet the rest of town.

A lot of noise,

A little conversation--

And something happens!

At 10 o'clock sharp
The spot comes on,
The show begins.

A folk singer, a combo,
A ballad, a protest.

Always timely
And up-to-date,
Sometimes controversial--
But never dull.

The program over,
Dialogue begins.

Here a group,
There a discussion--
Issues at hand,
And kids around
With the coffee house itch
And mission in mind,
Searching for meaning in life--
A cause for living.

Another cup,
A little cider...

The action quickens!

Hanging loose,
Playing it cool.

Just being around...
Caring
Listening
Waiting
Affirming
That God is at work.

A time for building
Honest relationships.

A spark
Leaping from heart to heart,
Igniting along the way
New life,
A new beginning...

Because a handful of kids

With the coffee house itch
Caught up in mission

Dared to venture, risk
Their lives, their faith
In a coffee house encounter...

Right where the action is.¹

The Scriptures tell us, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."² Romans 13: 10 says, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fullfilling of the law."

There is a great need shown in the Bible for love for our fellow man. John tells that if we say we love God but not our brother that we are liars. But has the Church of the past and more important is the Church of the present really loving our fellow man. We say we do. We go out and invite people inside our four walls to come to us if they want any help. We announce that we are going to have a revival only to see who can "pack his pew." We advertize that the church is going to have a study course and invite the community. We take a basket of goods to an underpriviledged family at Christmas. We sponsor a fifteen minute religious program every week on the local KVRC and then proudly stand and tell the world and God that WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR and that we are doing all that we possibly can for him.

Is the Church still reaching the world? Can we continue to stay with in our four walls and see people saved and feel that we are accomplishing our mission as a Church? Some people are saying "No! We are not doing all we could do.!"

The word that is being underlined in the churches today that are fullfilling their mission is WORLD:

God so loved the WORLD
Go ye into all the WORLD

For too long we have worried about, "What is the Church?" It is time we think about "What is the Church for?" Because of this new world--oriented spirit we see that the the Detroit Industrial Mission is at work on the worldly terrain of factory and office. We notice a congregation opening a storefront church in a Baltimore shopping center. We find dozens of coffee houses blossoming under church supervisions. Chaplaincies are multiplying in state parks, hospitals, airport terminals, on the docks, and along the Las Vegas Strip.

For these groups who are doing something about their concern and for many of us Southern Baptists comes the realization that Christ went out into the world where the sinners were. Because of this many church have begun special social ministries. Many have opposed these saying that we falter from the straight and narrow road of the Gospel when we attempt such ministries. I wonder, though, if this may not be what the Gospel is all about in the first place. This report, although not as complete as it needs to be, is about a relatively new ministry of our churches, that has blossomed with success one after another, know as the coffee house ministry. It has surely created an interest on my part to experiment and dwell deeper into the possibilities of making this a part of our church's ministry.

What exactly is a coffee house? There are quite a few different types of social outlets of the church labeled as "coffee house". It originally came from the name of the meeting place of the beatniks, where coffee, poetry, music, and general gathering of the group took place. The Christians have taken

these same approaches in order to reach lost people to Christ. These Christian coffee houses range from a building for all the people of the community to gather and associate in the heart of a downtown metropolis to a small town church with its little room for the young people of the community to meet on Friday and/or Saturday nights.

Let us begin by first looking at the general coffee house that serves all the people and for all occasions that is set up in the large metropolises. We will then progress on to the college coffee house with some statistics on its ministry across the nation. Then we will conclude with a plan schedule for the local church coffee house.

We will be able to receive much insight on the community coffee house by taking one particular coffee house in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and studying it. This particular coffee house reaches several different types of people with its various programs. Let us look quickly at some of the programs it offers.

I. Casual Confrontation

Staffed by a seventy member "lay group", Encounter is opened from seven to twelve hours a day, five days a week, with one or two persons manning the coffee urn at all times. Thus any and all may come in just to get coffee and talk. What a ministry it is just to take the time and listen to people and their problems. Who comes in and takes advantage of this ministry?

The unemployed worker poring out his job hunting frustrations

The senior citizen with time hanging heavily on his hands

The artist wondering why the church would be interested in

a Picasso.

The recently discharged mental patient trying to find a niche in the world again.

The teen ager wondering at the down-to-earth face of the church

The college student coming to twist the "pious".³

When you can reach this many people with this many problems you have accomplished something by just being there waiting for them.

II. Group encounter: the art forms.

To take the world seriously means to listen to it. So when a searching movie comes to town, signs go up in the theater inviting people over to the Encounter to discuss the movie over a cup of coffee. Many times these discussions lead to religious matters and the plan of salvation may be presented.

Discussions of novels and plays also have become a vehicle of church-world meetings. Too long we have condemned books, plays, and movies. Maybe its because we have been afraid to face the world with our Christian faith. We must face these. We must be open to them, if we are going to reach the people that these medias reach.

III. Group-life theology

Courses in Bible and theology taught by Lancaster Seminary faculty also provides for interesting and inspiring experiences. Advertised by fliers in hotels, motels, bowling alleys, taverns, and churches bring together an interesting spectrum of inquirers from the agnostics to the local pastor.

IV. Public Witness

"When the church puts its feet down on the urban street, it is not long before it begins to feel the heat of its pavement."⁴

When you are exposed to people, problems, and movements that

pulse through a city center--you can not help but become involved in rehumanization--Encounter in no exception.

It has made its premise available for a NAACP drive. Regular meetings for the city's civil rights groups in their thrust for open housing took place at the Encounter. Encounter's involvement in public issues has served two purposes:

1. It has provided a handle for church-men to come to grips with critical social questions and do something about them.

2. Served the gladly function of alerting local churches to these issues and prodding them to action.

Again many "Good Christian" people would object to the church's involvement in the issues of the community. But again we come back to our original question, "What is the church for?" And if the answers include ministering to the people of the community how can we get concerned with one part of their lives and not the rest. We are ^{NOT} compromising with the world, or going down to its level--but we are just reaching out to grab hold and pull up to our level. It takes the extended arm--we can not grab hold without first reaching out to get that hold.

V. The Night People:

Much of the activities of the coffee house takes place at night, if it in a location like the Encounter, for that is when most of the action takes place in the city. Lectures, discussions and programs with well known personalities usually attract large crowds late in the evenings. Friday nights are college nights with hootenannys, record spins, or just coffee and cokes with one's date. To break away from the conventional 7:30 p.m. time for all

church functions plays a vital role in reaching today's world. Many of these discussions and programs do not start until 11:00 or 12:00 p.m.

So we see the work of the city coffee house with its many programs and various missions. But under no condition may one continue to criticize the institution that sponsors such a mission. It must be remembered that almost every single successful coffee house sees itself as a companion to, and not a substitute for, the local church. The very life of Encounter and other coffee houses like it is dependent upon the local parishes.

But as has been mentioned earlier, there are other types of coffee houses. In fact the first and still most typical coffee houses are those operated upon the premises of a student center on Friday and Saturday nights. With this group can also be added your own local community coffee houses. But now let us consider the college coffee house as it has sprang up and multiplied across our nation from the small eastern schools to the big western universities and from the Bible belt schools to the metropolis universities of the north. Their number continually increases and the sponsors represent virtually every major Protestant denomination.

The best way to report on these is to look at some statistics taken from a survey several years ago. Although the survey was taken in 1965 most of the general trends still hold true.⁵

First, we might ask where these coffee houses are located? Two-thirds of the coffee houses reported on operate in existing student center basements, two in all-purpose rooms, three in rented storefronts. They are open an average of 15 hours a week spread

over three nights a week (the range is from three to 60 hours spread over one to seven days.) Generally, weekend openings are most common. All but two of the coffee houses are located within a block of a college campus or closer; the two exceptions are found in downtown business districts. Two thirds of them are sponsored predominately or completely by student groups, but several are run in whole or in part by local churches. Those located in urban settings are open to the general public as well as to college students; several, however, discriminate against high school students.

"What do you serve here?" The study shows a variety from "just coffee" to no fewer than 40 different kinds of drinks; par is two or three kinds of coffee, two or three kinds of tea, and a cold drink. The food side of the menu is just as diverse; from "chips and dips" and doughnuts at Koinonia (University of Connecticut) to 20 varieties of pastries at the Loft (University of Burlington). Two reported that they serve entire meals, one being the Unmuzzled Ox (Cornell) featuring Oxburgers. Prices range from a modest ten cents a cup to 25 or 30 cents for the more exotic flavors. Four of the houses set only a 50 cent admission charge for all the coffee you can drink.

The average coffee house has about 90 customers a day, around 90 per cent of them students. Some boast a higher faculty participation than others; some involve local churchmen. Protestants make up about 55 per cent of the average crowd; atheists account for somewhat more than half the remaining number, Catholics and Jews the rest. Again the range is from 100 per cent Protestant at the Java Room (Columbia, Mo.) to 20 per cent at Gon Squee

(a summer coffee house on Nantucket island.)

The number of staff members varies from one to 25, with an average daily work crew of five and an average total committee of thirty. Most of these are students, but five houses report that over half of their staffs are made up of local churchmen or faculty members. It is interesting to note that the workers are 86 per cent Protestant, 3 per cent atheists, while some 33 per cent of the customers are atheists. Thus, to a large degree, this is a mission of the church serving the unchurched.

The programs are just about as diversified as the menus. As a general practice over half of them offer planned programs, usually folk singing and poetry readings by local students who are seldom if ever paid for their participation. Discussions, lectures, movies, drama, jazz, soap-box speeches and classical music also have a place on some of the programs. Perhaps more important than all these others are the many spontaneous personal discussions which every coffee house committee hopes will arise.

These college coffee houses give many purposes for their work. Some and most feel that in many respects the coffee house stands in the same relationship to the campus ministry as the church social supper does to the church: it provides a place for fun and fellowship for meeting and making new friends. Most campus coffee houses actively seek to establish some kind of dialogue between two or more polar groups which at first seem to have nothing more in common than their mutual thirst for coffee. Very often this means that the students are enabled to meet informally with their teachers, or at least with some of them.

The fact that the coffee house is almost operated as a "public" snack bar or resaurant means that it differs from the church social supper, which unfortunately is usually a "closed" meal, after the manner of its sacramental analogue--at least it is very much an in-group affair; people no longer drop in off the street. The coffee house, on the contrary, offers an "Open" meal. When Christians start offering food through an open door, they must be prepared to accept the fact that anyone--and everyone--might come in, even "undesirables."

As James Gustafson writes in Treasure in Earthen Vessels:
 "God uses that which can be interpreted without reference to him as a means of ruling and making himself known. He uses the realm of the natural and the social as an agency of mask for his presence and will toward men."⁶

All the coffee houses see their activities as some manifestation of a Christian mission, though the specific form and degree of sophistication varies. Bill Holister of the Loft see the Christian's role in the coffee house "to be where Christ said he'd meet us--in the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned, the neighbor." Christians must point point to God's saving work "not by shouting or erecting neon signs, but by 'shouting the gospel with our lives' by being free to speak or be silent..." This is "to witness by a missionary presence" in the world.⁷

Now, what about your own community and its young people? Can you have a successful coffee house that will meet the needs of the teenagers? What does it take to create a coffee house with your own church youth group?

First you need a dedicated group of kids, a lot of determination hours of preparation and prayer and faith in God that He will bless your endeavour. In order to really get ready for the coffee house itself, you need about six work sessions and three rehearsals. These can take place in a week-end retreat, a camp, or conference, or an once-a-week meeting.

The first session can be used to see if the members of your group are really cut out for a coffee house endeavor. To begin the whole journey, make the meeting have a coffee house atmosphere. Ask each one present to draw on a piece of paper his life on a graph of some kind, especially noting the spiritual aspect of it. Then divide off into small groups asking each one to share with the others his graph. Ask the members if they are really interested in working together for the coffee house. If so, then they are ready for the first unit of preparation. (Let me make note that this section is taken from Coffee House Itch and is only an outline of the planning program that is presented in it. Because of the lack of desire to copy straight from the book and lack of time and space, the work sessions and rehearsal suggestions are only a surface look at the suggestions presented in this source book for presenting coffee houses.)

A few things should be kept in mind by the sponsor as work begins. One of the important things is "Why have a coffee house in the first place?" The coffee house ministry offers a unique opportunity for a meeting between the church and the secular society. It affords the young people with a face-to-face dialogue about the live issues of this day. It offers a tangible way for the youth of the church to get involved and in a way that often

pervokes a more meaningful commitment to Christ in their own lives. Finally it provides a climate for young people with a personal faith to "live out" this faith--that will ultimately earn the right to be heard.

Secondly, the sponsor must realize that the real secret of an effective coffee house is a "developed core of dedicated young people. These young people can assist in various ways--as waiters and waitresses, decorators, program committee, publicity committee, entertainers, etc. But their main responsibility is to be a "caring community" for kids who come to the coffee house. The group must be welded into a real team. They must be honest with each other, learn how to communicate their faith in non-religious terms, know how to study the Scriptures creatively, and how to relate to people in general. All of these will be covered in the work sessions and rehearsals.

Third, it is an important rule to remember that "where there is no commitment, there should be no coffee house." This should be understood from the first. If the young people are going to be in charge and feel responsibility for the coffee house, they must play a major role in its planning. The more they can think on their own, the better it will be. A good way to judge the sincerity of the group, is to have each one buy a work book on coffee houses such as The Coffee House Itch, and pay for it himself.

If you have a dedicated group who are really ready to work then you are ready to go full blast into preparation. Other publications that might be helpful in your preparation are Acts Alive and Man Alive. Acts Alive is a series of eight, fast moving, group

centered creative workbook based upon the Book of Acts. Man Alive is a creative study of the original Scriptures Handel used to create "The Messiah". Thus a 20th Century folk oratorio in a theater-in-the-round results.

The first work session is to help the young people learn the art of communication--especially with young people in the secular world. It seems that the biggest barrier the group will face is communication. Therefore, this is where the training needs to begin.

When the young people arrive, ask them to look through sections of the newspapers provided for them and tear out headlines, want ads advertisements, pictures, and anything else that would be significant in explaining what the average young person in the community thinks, cares and talks about. Then forming these into a collage, give each one a chance to explain his collage to the others. Then a collage should be drawn of what each person thinks he is like, a kind of self-portrait. Again remember honesty is necessary. It may hurt, but it is essential.

Again the second work session involves communication. At this session each individual is to take his person in the collage and speak for him. This can be written in a diary style or free verse poem or whatever, but it should include some expressions of strivings, troubles, disappointments, longings and yearnings. This will help each member of the group better realize some of the problems they might face at the coffee house. Then the session should close with some questions such as "Apart from certain externals, what are the things about your life that make you uninteresting to

this person?" Conclude by asking each one to answer, "If you had the chance, how would you go about relating to this person in a coffee house?" This is a good starting point in helping the young people get ready to listen and talk to the many who will be attending the coffee house when it is finally opened.

The rehearsal is used to get ready for the talent program part of the coffee house and as a time of recreation and fellowship for the group and invited guests. The first rehearsal should include a group from another denomination, the second include a group from another ethical, racial, or economical from your own and the third include a group of unchurched young people. Three main committees should be chosen prior to the first rehearsal. These are the decoration committee, the refreshment committee, and a program committee.

The decorating committee will be responsible for the tables, chairs, murals, lights, all sound equipment, and other decorations. Tables need to be covered with paper tablecloth. This is to provide a place for visitors to write or doodle. The wall decorations will be supplied by work designed during the work sessions.

The refreshment committee is responsible for creating the menu and serving the food. Menus should be placed on each table-- listing the choices and the price. Various members need to be chosen to work in the kitchen, while others will wait on tables. It will also be this committee's responsibility to take care of the purse.

The program committee will be responsible for organizing the "special feature" of the coffee house. This is usually a short, fifteen- or twenty-minute presentation. It is hoped that

it will lead to discussions and will be something of interest. There are four kinds of programs: (1) a sing-a-long hootenany with a folk combo, (2) a "show" made up of several people reading their poems, singing their original ballads, and interpreting their murals, (3) a short presentation and discussion of a controversial subject of interest, such as "the new morality", and (4) an open-ended time of creative expression and dialogue, such as describing your "spiritual pilgrimage" or "self-portrait" in a doodle--only this time you will be doing it with some of your invited guests. Hold the first rehearsal with another group so as to enlist their help and co-operation in your endeavor.

The third work session begins to help the young people better realize relationships within the coffee house itself. It is not that difficult to get a large crowd to attend. The problem is having a real impact upon the young people who do attend. The kids must be able to relate to themselves so that their enthusiasm might be contagious. To create this feeling--and possibly use as a resource for a program--have the group focus upon three verses from I Corinthians 13--the Love Chapter--that talk about relating to people in the right way. Take verses 4, 5, and 6 and put these into your own words. Include personal illustrations and examples. Then make this study of love practical. As you read what you have written ask yourself, "In all honesty, what is the biggest need I have at the moment in my life?" Try to realize your faults and try to establish some practical steps in overcoming these faults. With this, write a ballad or draw a picture of love (or lack of love) in your world. Remember this includes you.

The fourth work session is geared to help the individual feel the sense of belonging and being personally related to God and wonderfully related to others through Christ. In the second rehearsal it is suggested to invite a group from another ethnic or cultural background. This will see how much the group has really learned about relating with others. With this in mind, the classic "Good Samaritan" story will be used in this session. After writing some 20th Century comparisons, do one of three things: (1) write a ballad, (2) paint a mural, or (3) create a modern play or story. Now think about your own life and some situation you need to work on. Can you see any similarity between your thinking and the Levite's? Will you really be able to relate to "undesirables" in your community? Be honest. This will really help in formulating new attitudes.

At the second rehearsal, you may want to name the coffee house and decorate accordingly. Since you have had one rehearsal, you will probably be more relaxed and be able to do a much better job. The program committee now has a vast resource of material to use for a program. One suggestion might be a "theater-in-the-round" production of a modern take off on "The Good Samaritan".

The fifth work session begins the last section before the actual opening. Emphasis here is placed upon "encounter". You are now approaching the time when you will encounter young people who have been turned off by the "status quo" church and its language. You must get ready to avoid such language when such encounter occurs. Session five is designed to help in that area. Use II Corinthians 5: 17-18 and put Paul's Christian experience

summary into your own words. Get away from "church talk". Then go a step further and describe the change Christ has made in your life, not in words, but by shaping a piece of wire. Conclude the session by asking "What are the three greatest issues the young people of this community face?" and "In what way has Jesus Christ made a difference in your own outlook on these issues?"

In the last of the work sessions, look in the Bible to the typical coffee house type, the existentialist of Christ's time-- Thomas. Recreate the story of Thomas' doubting experience as he must have felt. This will help you to realize that we are all just seekers after the truth. Then in conclusion draw again a self-portrait as you have changed yourself during the training program.

It is time for the final rehearsal. This is the first time for unchurched guests. A coffee house Cabinet should be chosen to help organize the coffee house in its final stages. The decorating committee should choose what they want for wall murals and tough up what they can for opening night. The refreshment committee should know what it wants to serve and all business transacted handled. All waiters and waitresses should remember that their primary aim is to relate to people, not just do business. The program committee is responsible for the feature and should plan about a month in advance. The program should be more of an entertaining nature if it is geared more to the high schooler, and more open-ended discussions if college age is planned.

So here we have it, a training period outline to help your church youth plan a coffee house. You are now on your own. Well, not completely on your own. You have each other and, most of all, you have God. And as a team there is no limit to what can happen.

The coffee house--the church in mission, the church in the world. In the world of the college students, in the world of the downtown metropolis, in the world of your own youth group and the youth of your community. Coffee houses are allies, not competitors of the local church. They are "to be the hands and feet of the Body of Christ which enable it to work and walk in the world".⁸

I think a quote by Elizabeth O'Connor telling the purpose of "The Potter's House" in Washington sums up this paper's objectives in presenting this form of ministry:

"We will serve you, we will be with you in the way in which you naturally gather. We are not afraid of you. You can come and see those strange people called Christians in the market place--not in their place of worship but in your own natural habitat. You can come and ask questions. You can come and voice your hostilities. We will be with you six nights a week. We will serve you, we will love you, we will pray for you and if by chance you ask the reason for the hope that is in us, we will talk to you, but the talking will come at the end of scale. We will just be there where you can find us. We will live a little chunk of our life where you can watch what is going on... see whether we know anything about the mercy of God, whether or not there is a quality of being here which is different from what you have found else where. You come, and observe, and test us. We will not protect ourselves."⁹

"What we seek to do is to embody the Gospel--to be the forgiving community, the community which knows how to accept, knows how to love."¹⁰

May God bless the work of the coffee house, both now and in the future as men and women and boys and girls try to take the Gospel to the people. Where they can practice Christianity, not just preach it. Where they can love and do something about it, not just pray for people. Christ said "Go". With the coffee house ministry the church is really on the "Go."

FOOTNOTES

¹Coleman, Lyman, The Coffee House Itch (Newtown Pennsylvania: The Halfway House, 1967) p. 3-11.

²Mark 12: 31

³Fachre, Garbiel, "Encounter--Mission in the World," International Journal of Religious Education, Vol. 41 (October, 1964), p. 6.

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

⁵(statistics taken from) Perry, John D., Jr., "The Coffee House Ministry", Christian Century, Vol. 82, (February 10, 1965), pp. 180-181.

⁶Ibid., p. 181.

⁷Ibid., p. 182.

⁸Fachre, op. cit., p. 38.

⁹O'Connor, Elizabeth, Call To Commitment, Harper & Row, 1963, p. 54.

¹⁰Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Coleman, Lyman. Acts Alive. Newtown, Pennsylvania: The Halfway House, 1966.

Coleman, Lyman. The Coffee House Itch. Newtown, Pennsylvania: The Halfway House, 1967.

Fachre, Gabriel. "Encounter--Mission In the World," The International Journal of Religious Education, vol. 41 (October, 64), pp. 6-8.

O'Connor, Elizabeth. Call To Commitment. Harper & Row, 1963.

Perry, John D., Jr. "The Coffee House Ministry," Christian Century, vol. 82 (February 10, 1965) p. 180-181.