



## Reading the Signs

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By way of true confession, I eat at McDonald's...a lot. This past weekend, my husband and I visited our neighborhood McDonald's for breakfast. For the last few weeks, the electronic menu board in the drive-thru has been on the fritz. On Saturday, other than some gobbledy-gook symbols, only two breakfast items appeared: donut sticks and breakfast burritos. No matter. We knew the menu well enough to order what we wanted [except what I *really* wanted was an Egg White Delight, but apparently they've discontinued that nationally. Don't even get me started...!]



For us, it was a smooth process. Our off-menu items were ready for us at the window, and we went away satisfied with the transaction. Our familiarity with what is offered at McDonald's made that possible.

I felt for the new McDonald's customer, however, who might have wondered if donut sticks and burritos were the extent of the breakfast menu. They'd be left ordering something they really didn't want or passing on breakfast altogether.

To goad this franchise into fixing its menu board, I took a moment's pleasure at the thought of holding up the drive-thru line while I questioned the person in the speaker box: "What do you have for breakfast? How much is it? How many calories? What else do you have? How much is it? How many calories?..."

In our various ministries, literal signage is important. Sometimes our congregations will do a signage assessment to see whether someone could navigate to the sanctuary, the nursery, or the bathroom with ease. Then, we pop up little placards to direct the way.

But, there are different types of signposts that are just as important. For people new to our ministries or visiting our congregations, what do they notice about who we are, what we believe, and how we live out our faith? If care for the earth is important to us, are there signs of our commitment such as recycle bins or solar panels? If we decry racism, do we nonetheless have a worship environment that only really feels comfortable for our white members? At a recent event, an African-American woman pointed out the giant, white, praying hands on a banner that dominated the sanctuary and left her feeling excluded. It was an unintentional, but visible, sign of a disconnect between their claimed values and their reality.

Because of our familiarity with our congregations or our specialized ministries, we don't always notice when the signposts are missing. We can participate fully because we know what to expect – we know that Egg McMuffins are offered, even though the sign only refers to burritos and donut sticks. Most visitors, however, are not going to take the time to question us, as I wanted to do at McDonald's, about all we have to offer. If it's not apparent, they'll move on disappointed.

So, we need to ask whether our familiarity and comfort level are accurate measures of the friendliness, hospitality, and clarity of mission that we purport to offer. Sometimes it's better to find someone who will be completely honest with us about their experience of our ministries. "Invite a friend to church" Sunday might need to become less about us attracting people to join us and more about hearing candid feedback on what we do well and where we've missed the mark.