

Editorial: Who's responsible for the kind of church you are?

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I offer the following thoughts in the spirit of Andy Rooney, longtime commentator on CBS's *60 Minutes*.

I had a rather annoying experience today.

My wife and I finished our Christmas cards early this year. Early for us, anyway. I delivered them to the post office on Friday, very pleased with our work.

On Saturday, I opened our mailbox at the house to find a few of our Christmas cards. Oh, well. It's to be expected. Every year, at least a handful show up marked "Return to Sender: Addressee Unknown."

But these weren't. The United States Postal Service simply had sent them to the wrong address, the return address.

Quicker than it will take you to read this, I realized we might open the mailbox over the next few days to many, many more of our own Christmas cards.

This morning, I returned to the post office, cards in hand. The line wasn't too long, but the wait was. Only one register was open to help a line of people growing by the minute.

When I finally got to the counter, I explained to the postal service employee: "These were sent to the wrong address. They were sent to the return address and not the mailing address."

A long conversation ensued, the gist of which was that since we put the

return address on the back flap, the machine barcoded the cards for our address instead of the mailing address. In short, it was our fault.

I dutifully pointed out the fact that the stamp is with the mailing address on the front of the envelope and that we have mailed hundreds of Christmas cards for years with the return address on the back, and not one has been sent to the return address.

Most of that is true without question. The stamp on this card is on the front with the mailing address, and in all the years we've sent Christmas cards, we've not had any of our own cards sent to us instead of the intended recipients.

Hundreds of Christmas cards for years? These are round numbers that are true enough to make the point but would need to be more specific to stand up in court.

"And there are about 160 more like these. If we get them all back, what should we do?" He didn't offer much help.

Now, I ask you, whose responsibility was it that any—one or four or 160—Christmas cards were sent to the return address instead of the mailing address? (To date, only a handful have been delivered incorrectly.)

I bet we can argue that question in circles for days.

What we don't have to argue is that neither the United States Postal Service nor my wife and I want to take responsibility.

I left the post office and drove to my next stop—the North Texas Tollway Authority Tolltag Store.

I walked in and saw something that sent a little shiver through me. I saw the stanchions used to make the amusement park-like mazes, and I saw cubicles along two walls, each with an employee helping a customer. If

you've ever been to a metropolitan licensing office to apply for a driver's license, you know the chill I felt.

A cheerful assistant came right up to me just seconds after I took my place in line. I can be suspicious of that kind of cheer. She asked the reason for my visit, took my name and said I would be called shortly.

As it turns out, I didn't need to be called because, from my place in line, a screen flashed my name and the cubicle number to which I was to go. The chair in the cubicle had a number on the back of it—plainly visible—that matched the number next to my name on the screen. I thought this was pleasantly helpful.

I sat down and was greeted by an employee, who—despite working with the public—enjoys his job. He asked me clear questions that were very easy to answer, accepted my answers without making things difficult and made the changes to our account we needed to be made.

It all took about three minutes ... or less.

As I walked out the door, I thought, "I've never had a bad experience with a Tolltag Store," mentally comparing this to a host of annoying experiences with the other organization cited herein.

Now, I ask you, whose responsibility was it that I was in and out of the NTTA Tolltag Store in record time with exactly what I needed?

I bet we can argue that question in circles for days.

What we don't have to argue is that my experience in the Tolltag Store was very different from my earlier experience.

If we apply these experiences to your church, are you more like the post office or the Tolltag Store?

Is it the responsibility of those who visit your church to know where they are supposed to go, to act how they're supposed to act, to put their return address in the right place? If they get it wrong, do you offer them any help to get it right, or do you just shrug your shoulders and wait for them to give up and leave?

Or is it your responsibility to greet everyone who comes through your door, to go out ahead of them placing directions in their way so they know exactly where they need to go and what they need to do, to be with them as needed changes are made? If they get it wrong, do you show them how to get it right, and do you keep at it until the work is done to everyone's satisfaction?

Postage is high and getting more expensive. My wife and I keep talking about sending e-cards. After our latest experience with the postal service, we have one more reason for going digital.

Tolls are expensive, too. My wife and I avoid toll roads as much as possible and yet willingly prepay for a Tolltag with little or no complaint. When out-of-state guests want to know what that "T in a circle" is on our windshield, we respond cheerfully, "Oh, that's a tolltag."

Inasmuch as our churches are made of the same people who make up the marketplace—and knowing how people sometimes are treated in the marketplace—I wonder, based on the experiences of those who spend time with us, what people are saying to themselves and others about our churches as they walk out the door.

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