

Evangelism Through the Local Church

Jesus did not leave a crusade behind him, but a church. He did not intend evangelism to be done by one gifted individual but by the impact of the church on its surrounding society. This workshop will offer some help, based on experience, on how this can be done

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Introduction:

The Lord did not leave us a Crusade to carry on his work, or even an Alpha Course! He left us a community of frail, broken but redeemed people - the church. And the church is his main way of extending the frontiers of the Kingdom of God. If the local church is warm and welcoming, if there is an outward orientation on the part of minister and congregation alike, then it should become a magnet in the locality. People will want to bring their friends along. It will grow in the normal course of events. On the contrary, it will not grow if there is no provision for the youth, if there is little love, if the services are dreary, if there is lots of 'insider' language and attitudes, and constant appeals for money.

Here are some ways the church can reach out:

- A. **Prayer for individuals.** Not much of that in most churches. But in the 2/3 world where the gospel is growing so fast they depend on prayer. In the West we go for methods, but we do not have because we do not ask (James 4.2). Remember it is God who is the evangelist. Prayer opens the way.
- B. **Testimony** has always been powerful but now more than ever because of the postmodern culture and because of the widespread impression that Christianity has had its day. Every Christian has the story of the interaction of their life with that of Jesus. Just show that Jesus is alive and can be met today. There is no need to be fearful. Nobody can rubbish your personal experience.

- C. **Invitation.** Many outreach events are spoiled because people do not invite others. Of course there is a cost. An attractive lifestyle, time spent on developing relationships, hospitality, sharing their interests. But then you can invite to a suitable event and expect a yes not because they want to come but they want to please you! Random invitations rarely work. We need to build bridges. 'Do Go' does not work. 'Do come with me' often will.
- D. **Alpha etc.** One of the most effective forms of outreach a church can lay on. It suits PM culture which is suspicious of authority figures, disenchanted with institutions, doubtful about truth claims, confused about personal identity, looking for reality, short on hope, yet hungry for spiritual experience. The 'what is the meaning of life' question grips. So does the humour, the food, the quality videos, the companionship, the Holy Spirit weekend. There are other courses. Or make up your own. Meetings must be supplemented with good personal care.
- E. **Hospitality.** Jesus knew what he was doing when he left us a meal to remember him by. A good meal breaks down suspicion, encourages openness, and makes people receptive. Events based round food work really well. You need a speaker who has charm, directness and tact. You need a well produced invitation card and use response cards after the talk is over. Ensure there are nurture group in place to feed people into after the event. I find this one of the most fruitful of all approaches today.
- F. **The guest service** at which there is very careful preparation, much prayer, intensive emphasis on inviting unchurched friends, the use of testimony and very familiar music, and a challenging talk for decision. This may be a one off decision for Christ, but most people need more time these days, so make it a challenge for joining an enquirers or similar group. This done imaginatively say 3 times a year is very effective in the ongoing life of the church.
- G. **The occasional services.** If the minister himself is an evangelist, he or she will find the occasional services invaluable. People come looking to the church for something – they may not know what it is. But we know it is Christ. And baptism preparation, marriage preparation and very careful work at and after funerals are often pathways to a living faith.
- H. **The use of neutral ground.** Business or professional meetings (like Mens' Breakfasts or Women's lunches) can be very easy to invite folk to and very effective if the right context and speaker are there. I have found large and appropriate meetings for doctors, lawyers etc have led to many joining enquirers' groups, and coming to faith. Concerts with a talk are

also invaluable. So is anything to do with sport -especially, but certainly not exclusively, for young people. . The use of film in a variety of ways is very acceptable, especially with a discussion to follow. If you have a competent apologist a debate is a massive draw. A carol service is a wonderful way to present the gospel – J. John leads hundreds of people to Christ every year through a string of carol services.

- I. **Taking a team away** is a marvellous way both to serve other localities and to bind your own team together in unforgettable fellowship. Complementary gifts, a whole range of experiences, the testimonies, the fellowship, the variety of personalities – and it stimulates the receiving end to do likewise. This may be a large mission team. It may be a car-full for a single event. It is invariably better than a solo outing.
- J. **Leisure-based events** like a golf match or soccer tournament, a sports day, a skiing holiday, hill walking, sailing – these draw people together and often to Christ. Any shared event can work – dominoes, gardening, whatever.
- K. **Evangelism in the home.** It could be an invitation to supper and conversation. It could be a group in the home to hear a speaker, to do an investigative Bible study, to have an Enquirers Group meeting there, to have some interesting person speak on ‘My God and my job’, or perhaps to mark a crisis or celebrates something joyful.
- L. **Visiting** seems almost to have died out, but it opens the door for evangelism. Young people have shown the way (YWAM and OM both major on visiting and questionnaires in the streets, or selling Christian material in shops or malls). In the US, Evangelism Explosion is a method of evangelism based on visiting, as is Michael Wooderson’s *Good News Down Our Street* in UK. Dan Cozens’ Walk of 1000 men’ is not exclusively parochial but many men from a parish join these teams for visiting, small meetings, etc in a part of the country where careful preparations have been made. They are fed by the saints, have only five pounds in their pockets and sleep on church floors.
- M. **Community service** is one of the best ways the local church can impact its area. It needs to analyze where the need is and seek to supply it, whether it be prison visiting, adoption services, soup kitchens, gyms, a church coffee shop or restaurant, the occasional fiesta, services to the aged etc. Not only is this Christlike service. It wins us the right to be heard. People wonder why we offer something for free like this.

There are countless other ways in which outreaches like these can be effective. One church I know did a ‘strictly come dancing’, another ran a discussion group for mothers who had dropped off their kids for school, another ran an Any Questions at a neutral venue. Passion plays in the streets have been invaluable for centuries, and open air drama-and-testimony events in populous places, accompanied by plenty of personal workers to talk with people watching, prove very effective. *On the Move* is now an international means of open air outreach with free BBQ, music, and people to talk to those who come. They are amazed to find that there is such a thing as a free lunch after all.

Imagination, passion, wholeheartedness, prayer, and every member ministry – these are the qualities needed. And in today’s post-Christian society the more that can happen off church property the better.

Further reading: Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church*