

CHAPTER 29

Visitation Initiative— Toward a Local Church Evangelism Strategy

Introduction:

Diagnostic Questions for Local Church Analysis:

- a. When do the unsaved hear the Gospel in our local church ministry?
 - 1) How do you know that those who are reached are unsaved?
 - 2) Is there a concerted effort to reach the unsaved through this ministry?
- b. When are the lost given an opportunity to commit their lives to Jesus Christ?
 - 1) Do they have the opportunity to receive salvation in Christ?
 - 2) How is their commitment confirmed?
 - 3) Are there solid avenues for the follow-up (and discipleship) of new converts?
- c. Are Christians being trained in personal evangelism through our church ministry?
 - 1) Does the church have a systematic training program for those interested?
 - 2) Are they given opportunities to share their faith and apply what they learn?
- d. Does our church have any type of accountability structure to encourage believers to continue in evangelism?
 - 1) How are they held accountable?
 - 2) Are there support groups in place to encourage the weary?

Are the above questions valid?

- a) If so, is the church accomplishing its first priority?
 - 1) If it is not accomplishing its first priority, why not?
- b) What needs to be done to help it accomplish its first priority?
 - 1) The following are some general points of encouragement

The next section seeks to answer two questions:

Why do we emphasize evangelism?

How do we emphasize evangelism?

I. Some Emphasis in Ministry Verses:

1. Emphasis Outward:
 - a. Three of the five Great Commission emphasize proclamational evangelism, pointing the church outward to a lost world
 - b. Ephesians 4:11 includes three current ministers (if apostles and prophets are considered ceased gifts):
 - 1) Evangelists—outward focus
 - 2) Pastors—inward shepherding focus
 - 3) Teachers—inward teaching focus
 - c. The Great Commission forces us to look out. Of the three leaders provided to the church, the evangelist is the leader with an outward focus.
2. Emphasis Inward:
 - a. “Make disciples” in the Matthew 28 Great Commission passage can be made to have an almost exclusive inward emphasis
 - b. Two of the three leaders in Ephesians 4:11 have an inward focus: pastors and teachers
 - c. Pastors are called to “shepherd the flock of God,” Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4
 - d. Other verses point to the importance of relationships within the local church:
 - 1) The priority of relationship among believers, Galatians 6:10

- 2) The 62 “one another” commands focus on relationships within the fellowship of the local church
3. Inward emphasis or outward emphasis? How can this apparent conflict be solved in the ministry of the local church? Can they both be in operation simultaneously?
 - a. A look at the evangelistic strategy of the apostle Paul:
 - 1) Acts 17:16-17—in the synagogue (1) Jews, (2) Gentiles, and in the marketplace (3) whoever happened to be present
 - 2) Rom 1:16-17—to the Jew first, and also to the Greek
 - 3) But then, you say, that was the evangelistic strategy, not the church ministry strategy ...
 - b. When churches were founded in cities, Paul visited the churches and ministered:
 - 1) “... They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed,” Acts 14:21-23
 - 2) “And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches ... So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily,” Acts 15:41; 16:5
 - 3) “And they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed,” Acts 16:40
 - 4) “He found some disciples [in Ephesus],” Acts 19:1
 - 5) “On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread,” Acts 20:7
 - 6) Address to Ephesian elders, Acts 20:17-38
 - 7) “So we found some disciples, and stayed there [Tyre] seven days,” Acts 21:4
 - 8) “We reached Ptolemais where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them one day,” Acts 21:7
 - 9) “There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days,” Acts 28:14
 - c. Did the apostle continue evangelizing cities after churches were already founded there?
 - 1) While this leads to a certain argument from silence, certain hints are found toward the end of the Book of Acts, along with material on Paul’s ministry in the epistles (e.g. 1 Corinthians 9; 2 Corinthians 5-6; Colossians 1, etc.)
 - 2) e.g. Appolos evangelized the Jews in Ephesus, though it seemed that a church was already founded there—although the church may not yet have separated from the synagogue in that town, Acts 18:28 (cf. Acts 19:8-9).
 - 3) Paul evangelized in Rome (Acts 28:30-31), although a church was already founded in that town, as the believers from that church (or the churches) met Paul at the Appii Forum and the Three Taverns (Acts 28:14-15).

To whom is any congregation ministering?

The Following are ideas based on knowledge of six distinct groups of people that a congregation should minister to (placed in order of importance, as long as all are being ministered to):

1. Absentees, Luke 15
2. Shut-ins, 1 Thessalonians 5:14
3. Members, Acts 20:28
4. Regulars, Acts 20:28
5. Visitors, 1 Corinthians 14:22 (?)
6. Community outreach, Acts 17:16-17 (community leaders may fit into this category).

The following notes have combined these six groups into four:

Absentee and visitor names can be tabulated from a Friendship Register or from a form that every attendee fills out every Sunday morning. Those that are ushering, on nursery duty, in choir, or on the platform may be left out, depending on when and how the form is filled in and collected.

It is recommended that Absentee names (kept by family last name) be collected in groups, such as A-1 (absent one Sunday), A-2 (absent two Sundays in a row), A-3 (absent three Sundays in a row), and A-4+ (absent four or more Sundays in a row). A similar procedure may be used for Visitors: V-1 (first time guest), V-2 (second time guest), V-3 (third time guest), and V-4 (fourth time guest). There are computer software packages available to assist churches in keeping these type of records. The following is based on a church having these names available for ministry.

I. Absentee Care-Giving, Luke 15:4-7; I Thessalonians 5:14:

- A. Goal: To nurture those who have been absent from our fellowship and minister to the needs of those who may be drifting
- B. Who? The Church Secretary, the Shepherding Team (Pastors & Deacons) & the Care Giving Team
- C. What?—Some ideas—these need to be decided upon by church leaders:
 1. Following the First Absence (A-1): Information Ministry (send them a bulletin with a handwritten note from someone), Telephone Contact (to see if there is a health or some other need)
 2. Following the *Second Absence* (A-2): Information Ministry Care-Giving Ministry (a team of trained Care-Givers visit all A-2s)
 3. Following the *Third Absence* (A-3): Information Ministry.

II. Member and Regular Care-Giving, Acts 20:28:

- A. Goal: To visit in the homes of members and regulars every year
- B. Who? The Church Secretary and the Shepherding Team (Pastor and trained deacons)
- C. What? Someone from Shepherding Team visits the homes of all members and regulars once every 6 months.

III. Guest Evangelism and Enfolding, John 13:34-35:

- A. Goal: To lovingly reach out with the Gospel to those who have come to us and enfold them into our fellowship.
- B. Who? The Church Secretary, the Senior Pastor, the Intercessory Team, the Cookie Coordinator, the Care-Giving Team, the Hospitality Team and the Prayer Chain Ministry Leader.
- C. What? (again, these need to be decided upon and tweaked by church leaders)
 1. Following 1st Sunday morning visit (V-1):
 - a. Personal Handwritten Note from Pastor, Deacon, or Sunday School teacher;
 - b. Intercessory Prayer Team: Designated intercessors begin to pray for names;
 - c. Cookie/Muffin/Coffee Mug Ministry brings something to the home;
 - d. Care-Giving Ministry: Trained care-givers visit the home and meet spiritual need encountered (if a decision is made for Christ in any of the Care-Giving visits, this moves them into another category not dealt with in this material).
 2. Following 2nd Sunday morning visit (V-2):
 - a. Small Group [or Sunday School] Ministry. They are contacted and invited by an age-appropriate Sunday School class
 - b. Hospitality Ministry: Someone is prepared to invite 2nd time visitors to lunch—the Sunday School is a good mechanism for this ministry
 3. Following 3rd Sunday morning visit (V-3):
 - a. Engraved New Testament: They are given an engraved New Testament with their initials and receive a second Care-Giving Visit
 4. Following 4th Sunday Morning Visit (V-4):
 - a. Prayer Chain Ministry: If they are saved, they are invited to consider being placed on a prayer chain (preferably with their Sunday School class or Small Group)
 - b. Directory Ministry: A church directory is brought to their house, and their names are recorded for future editions of the Directory if they are interested.

IV. Community Outreach, Matthew 22:9; Acts 1:8; 17:17:⁵²⁶

- A. Goal: To have a **weekly** program geared to reaching the lost in our community with the Gospel, through any and every method available—care giving visitation and/or door-to-door visitation are encouraged here.
 - 1. This weekly program is not meant to replace or supersede annual special events (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter), revivals, Vacation Bible School, or other such events.
 - 2. This weekly program is designed to assist Block Parties, Servant Evangelism projects, etc.
 - 3. Community outreach is designed to assure that a weekly evangelism thrust is taking place into the community.
- B. Who? The Care Giving Team—they are dividing their time with the Guest Evangelism and Enfolding—or another team can be set up.
- C. What? Three sample approaches:
 - 1. Door-to-door with a needs-type questionnaire, getting into the Gospel
 - 2. “Welcome Wagon” type of ministry—to new water hook-ups in the area (these names are available from the Water Company, but do not give information on apartment dwellers)
 - 3. Street evangelism
 - 4. Jail ministry
 - 5. Brainstorms by Care-Giving Team à la *Conspiracy of Kindness* by Steve Sjogren.

V. Discussion Items for Evangelism:

- A. Should not the pastors and deacons work together in care-giving as a *Shepherding Team*?
- B. Should the regular care-giving responsibilities of the congregation be equally divided between pastors and deacons?
- C. Given that one person can have vital contact within a group of no more than 80 people, if the church is larger, how should the congregation be divided?
 - 1. Along relational lines
 - 2. By geographical situation
 - 3. By ministry or age (e.g. Sunday School classes)
 - 4. In some other way?
- D. The bigger question is: As a church grows, how is it best divided – by ministry ages (Sunday School), by cell-group or in geographical format?
- E. Should non-members be allowed to be a part of our church’s visitation teams?

VI. Making It Happen in the Local Church:

Introduction: The three “Es” mentioned by Darrell Robinson need to be kept in mind:⁵²⁷

Exaltation
Edification
Evangelism

Implimentation: “Flake’s Formula” for local church implimentation should be remembered here:

- 1. Discover the prospects
- 2. Expand the organization
- 3. Train the workers
- 4. Provide the space
- 5. Go get the people.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶Mark Mittelberg’s , *Building a Contagious Church* (2000) not only contains numerous ideas for community outreach, it also provides the organizational structure to do it in the local church.

⁵²⁷See Darrell Robinson, *Total Church Life* (Nashville: Broadman, 1997).

⁵²⁸See Charles Kelley, *How Did They Do It? The Story of Southern Baptist Evangelism* (New Orleans: Insight, 1993), 93.

VI. Resources:

- Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 1963)
- Larry Gilbert, *Team Evangelism: How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ When You Don't Have the Gift of Evangelism* (Church Growth Institute; Lynchburg, VA, 1991)
- Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker*, *The Disciple Making Church*, and *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ; Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984, 1990, 1988 respectively)
- Lessons in Assurance*, NavPress.
- Ralph Neighbour, Jr. *The Shepherd's Guidebook* (Houston, TX; Touch Publications, Inc., 1988)
- _____. *Where Do We Go from Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church*, (Houston, TX; Touch Publications, Inc., 1990)
- Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness* (Ann Arbor, MI; Servant Publications, 1993)
- SonLife Ministries, *Foundations for Youth Ministry* seminar (Wheaton, IL; SonLife Ministries, 1989).

Toward Becoming an Evangelistic Pastor

Introduction:

Not having arrived myself, but in constant need of rejuvenating an evangelistic spirit, I write these notes as a pastor to pastors.

The following notes are suggestions for the pastor to develop and/or maintain an evangelistic heart. It is very likely that pastors can and will become embroiled in the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for greater things, just as any other Christian. Therefore, comes the question, are there tangible ways to develop or maintain an evangelistic spirit? Please consider the following suggestions based on John 4:35.

John 4:35, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."

The question becomes, how do we lift up our eyes and look on the fields to see that they are white for harvest?

1. "Behold, I say to you":
 - a. One must begin by asking God for a heart for the lost
 - b. One must memorize and meditate on key verses on evangelism, such as John 4:35-38, 1 Cor 9:16-23, and 2 Cor 5:20-6:2, to put them on one's tongue and in one's heart (cf. Deut 30:14)
 - c. To these verses others can be added, such as 1 Cor 15:10 and Eph 5:15-16, as well as the Great Commission passages: Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8

2. "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields":
 - a. Begin a program of door-to-door visitation to meet people in your church field who have nothing to do with your church, but are still your responsibility to reach
 - 1) Starting from the neighborhood of the church, begin a systematic plan of door-to-door visitation of every home
 - 2) Be sure to seek to share the Gospel in every home, to gauge people's responsiveness to the Gospel, which is the whole purpose of the exercise
 - 3) Be sure to pray with the people for their needs, even if they are not responsive to the Gospel
 - 4) Even one hour of door-to-door visitation can be a life-changing experience!
 - b. Begin a prayer list of lost people you encounter in your church field—its length over time will break your heart, and show you the white harvest in a very short time!

3. "That they are white for harvest":
 - a. By faith expect people to be receptive to the Gospel the first time you speak with them
 - b. By faith, always include a presentation of the simple Gospel in every sermon, along with an invitation to receive Christ
 - c. Use stories of your actual evangelism opportunities in your sermons to encourage the saints
 - d. Begin organizing interested church members to join you in door-to-door visitation, they will provide you with accountability in the work of the evangelist

Conclusion: If you do these things, you will be well on your way to developing a heart for the lost, which, by the way, needs to be continually nurtured throughout your ministry!