

CHAPTER 9



LAITY LEADING in EVANGELISM

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Making Disciples of Jesus Christ

How would you define evangelism? Sharing the gospel message

What is the gospel message? Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent here to show God to us in the flesh, to teach us how to live in obedience to God, that believing in Him we will have eternal life, which begins when we welcome Christ into our life.

Why should we share the message?

Jesus told us to – Great Commission Matt 28:16-20 I can't find anywhere in the scripture where certain of us are exempt or that it says to do this if we feel like it, or when we get around to it. We rewrite this passage!

Reach the Bishop's goals

Best reason – want someone else to have what we have, experience what we have experience in our personal relationship with God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

When you see a good movie, watch a great ball game, eat at a fantastic restaurant, you want to tell someone about it, share the experience with them.

How much more important is it that someone hear the gospel message than to hear about a restaurant or a movie?

What holds us back? What are our reasons/excuses for not sharing the gospel?

Fear

Rejection by the person we're talking to

Rejection by others, what will others think of us, religious fanatic?

Failure, won't know the right things to say or the answers to their

questions

Afraid of making the other person feel bad

Time – it takes time to do this and we're too busy. We are too busy, need to watch over-committing,

Knowledge deficit – we don't know how to begin, what to say, with whom to share the message

Not my job – it's someone else's responsibility, the pastor, the evangelism committee

Self-centered in our relationship with God, want to grow our faith, not concerned about others having a relationship, growing in their faith.

What needs to happen to me to commit to sharing the gospel message?

Know what I believe

Take the time to think about, write down, tell someone with whom you are comfortable, your own faith story. Do this in pairs if time allows. Tell the person sitting next to you what has happened in your life that is important in your faith journey, how it began, the significant mile markers in your own personal experience.

Have a real, living, personal relationship with God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit

Open myself to God's leading and the Holy Spirit working – in this we admit we don't have all the answers, don't know who to share our faith with or what to say but we spend time in prayer and are willing to listen and submit to God's leadership in our life

Commit...then recommit...then recommit...then recommit

Daily time in prayer and Bible study – If I were to say one thing was absolutely critical, essential, more important than anything else, this would be it. Through this our personal relationship grows, we know God in a very real way, God plants in our mind who to share the message with, what to say.

Focus on others with whom I have contact each day- take our focus off ourselves and put it on others

Reality of this is that we become healthier

It's the I'm Third principle, God first, then others, then myself

Truly care about others – for some this seems to come naturally (gift of God to be this way) – for the rest of us we have to cultivate this. It seems to me that men/women are naturally self centered, and that it takes effort to overcome this.

Look for opportunities – move sharing the gospel message from the back burner to the front burner (or put it on the stove!)

Realize you don't have to evangelize the world, just the person put in your path. God's leading is critical, easy to over extend, over commit.

How do I begin?

Prayer

Know my faith story

Trust God – the Lesson of the Loaves from Zan Holmes sermon at Annual Conference

Become aware of people with whom I have contact that need Christ in their lives...Needs based evangelism

Different need levels include Physical (food, shelter), Safety and security, Social (love and belonging), Esteem (self esteem and esteem from others), Fulfillment (meaning and purpose), Knowledge, and Aesthetic (beauty and joy).

Be aware of openings people give you. Starter statements include: Is God in this need (or problem)? Do you feel His presence in your life? Have you opened yourself to God's help? Could I talk to you about how God has helped me through a similar situation, how He helps me each day? I'll keep this situation in my prayers. Would you like to pray about it now?

Think about the image you project as a Christian. Do you look, act, think, talk like someone who has something other people would want? Do you project the Beatitudes? Does your life reflect the fruits of the Spirit? Are they visible in how you relate to people?

Certainly not talking about material success

Become an inviting person. Keep in mind our goal is to make Disciples of Jesus Christ, not to make Methodists. We just happen to believe in the gospel message as presented by the United Methodist Church.

Why don't we invite? Don't think about it, don't think our church has something to offer (maybe you need more excuse events, non-threatening events that are easier to invite people to attend)

Who is in your FRAN plan? Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, and Relatives – Correction, this should be Neighbors..

Need a mind set change – many of us go about our daily, weekly lives, never even thinking about inviting someone to an event at our church...Pray

Must be willing to develop a relationship with this person. Listen to them.

Have some knowledge of the Bible so that what you are telling them isn't just your story, but is backed up with scripture.

Ten steps

Accept that you have a responsibility to fulfill in the area of evangelism.

Know your faith, who you are as a Christian, what your faith is based on.

Love others; want them to have what you have

Pray, be willing to listen to God's direction in your life

Look for people with needs, who need Christ in their life. Be prepared with opening questions or statements to start the conversation

Develop a relationship; spend time necessary to develop the relationship

Pray that the Holy Spirit will find fertile ground in which to work

Connect them to a body of believers

Follow up with them. Talk...listen...listen...listen

Pray

Language is important, must be real, relevant to them

Don't over complicate it. Bishop Blake's approach, just be ready to share your story and show that Christ is relevant in your life.

Be patient. Be prepared in season and out (2 Timothy 4:2). Be ready at any time, be willing to take the time.

Realize their response isn't up to you. Not only are others involved but ultimately God, the Holy Spirit, and the person's response to the working of the Holy Spirit are what matter. This takes pressure off us but doesn't excuse us from scattering seeds, watering, fertilizing, and working the ground.

Receptivity rating scale – rating of events in peoples lives that make them more open to receiving the gospel message. Death of spouse, divorce, marital separation, jail term, death in family, personal injury or illness, marriage, fired from work, marital reconciliation, retirement, change in family member's health, pregnancy. On the list but way down in significance were Christmas and Easter.

This is needs based evangelism. Basically, people have a need – whether it is

Physical (food, shelter, health; Jesus healed and fed)

Safety and Security (not threatened, feel like there is a foundation on which our life is built; God's very personal love for us – two sparrows of so little value, yet God knows when one falls, cares much more about us, knows us, even the hairs of our head are numbered.)

Social (accepted by others; Jesus restored those who had been isolated from society, i.e. the lepers healed, the woman with flow of blood healed.

Esteem (we think well of ourselves, not condemned; Christ refused to condemn the woman caught in adultery)

Meaning and Purpose (need to have purpose in our life, more than just getting up each day and doing our "job"; Jesus challenged them to live according to a higher called, to give themselves in service to God and others)

Knowledge (desire for understanding and wisdom, ability to make good decisions)

Aesthetic (beauty and joy, appreciate nature, the arts; person is at a level where he/she are comfortable, at peace, can enjoy those things which are way beyond what is needed for survival)

Listening is crucial. Woody Davis says effective evangelism is 80% listening. Most people are unable to hear the good news until they feel they have been heard. Jesus often asked questions of people.

Affirming a person's worth. Methodists, because we lead with grace are good at this. It is a mystery why our "brand" of religion isn't "selling" better. I think it is a marketing problem. The sales force is asleep at the switch.

Looking back on my involvement in evangelism, I have been exposed to two different approaches. Woody Davis, in *Grow Your Faith and Give it Away*, developed and taught a 13 week course in evangelism training. Most of the thoughts in these notes are a gleaning from Dr. Davis' study manual. For some, this training will increase confidence and get them started. For others, their faith grows but it doesn't get them off their rear end and get them involved.

Bishop Blake teaches that it is simply telling our story, that we don't need a training course to do this. "Just do it."

I think the results can be the same – we can bear fruit or be unfruitful – with either approach.

I attended a Teacher Appreciation Banquet in Cushing a few nights ago and was privileged to enjoy entertainment by a young man, Kyle Dillingham (who incidentally was educated at our Methodist University, OCU) who plays the fiddle or violin. I've never understood the difference. To me it depends on what music you're playing, if it's the Orange Blossom Special... it's a fiddle, if it's Beethoven, it's a violin. As he performed, he was totally absorbed in what he was doing; his whole body was wrapped up in playing this instrument from the tips of his toes, to the ends of his fingers, to the ends of the hair on his head. He enjoyed what he was doing. He played songs he wanted to play as well as requests from the audience. At one point, he serenaded a young lady in the audience who'd just come to Cushing as an exchange student from France. All the words in the song were French so we had no idea what he was saying but the way he said them and sang them, you could tell that it was a very romantic song. He played quite a while, took quite a bit of time to entertain us. He was totally committed to meeting our needs that evening, entertaining us. I think this is a little of what God wants from us. He wants this type of commitment, focus on others – only He's willing to begin with just a fraction of the commitment and total absorption that Kyle exhibited that night.

The main ingredient is our commitment, our decision to share our faith, invite people, to have a desire to give to people what we have – faith in a wonderful Lord who loves us.

The Faith-Sharing Congregation: Developing a Strategy for the Congregation As Evangelist by Roger K. Swanson, Shirley F. Clement

The Faith-Sharing Congregation suggests that there are four “evangelists” in every congregation: the pastor(s); the laypeople; the congregation; and families. The book offers simple, concrete ways that each of these “evangelists” spreads the good news of Jesus Christ: hospitality, personal relationships, storytelling, family rituals, welcoming ministries, ministries of belonging, and discipling ministries. [1]

The Faith-Sharing Congregation was written for pastors of mainline congregations and those with whom they share leadership and responsibility. This book offers a local church strategy for doing evangelism. Central to this strategy for evangelism is an understanding of the primary task as faith development and faith deployment. What is primary is what happens to people as the result of their participation in the congregation. How are they received and initiated into the church’s fellowship? How is their faith formed and nurtured? How are they sent out into their daily lives to serve as disciples of Jesus?

Strategy for Evangelism

The faith-sharing congregation strategy for doing evangelism in and through the local congregation focuses on the congregation’s life together as well as on particular ministries. Five principles for this strategy are:

1. Evangelism is not one option among several that a local congregation can choose to act upon.
2. Evangelism is the work of all the people, clergy, and laity, working together.
3. The personality or culture of a congregation is as important for the work of evangelism as any specific ministry of evangelism. People join churches today on the basis of being welcomed, nurtured and challenged.
4. The work of evangelism is best served, not by lifting up evangelism, but by focusing on the congregation’s primary task of faith formation. Christ is the one we must lift up, not a particular task or committee of the church.
5. The near future of the Christian enterprise rests with reinvigorated congregational life. People are found by Christ and grow in Christ within local congregations. The denomination of a local congregation is diminishing in importance. Whether people are welcomed, fed, and equipped for ministry within its fellowship is what is important. [2]

Sharing Faith through Hospitality

For many people church is the one place, other than the family, where they experience the warmth of being welcomed home. The essence of hospitality is to be known and welcomed, needed and loved. Hospitality is not church work, but the work of the church. It is the experience of being at home with God's family, the congregation. [3]

Do you know how other people experience your congregation? The authors suggest setting up listening posts: informally interview several persons who are fairly new to the congregation. Ask what their experience was and is coming into the church. What meant the most when they first attended? The same questions can be used of marginal members and with those persons who visit but keep formal relationships with another congregation. Experience suggests that many members choose to remain peripheral and occasional attendees for the same reasons that visitors elect not to return. [4]

Congregations tell the good news of Christ through the practice of hospitality. As we have seen, the core process of a faith-sharing congregation includes: welcoming (reaching and receiving people), belonging (relating people to God and nurturing them in the faith), and discipling (growing in discipleship and being sent into the community to make it more loving and just).

Sharing Faith through Personal Relationship and Story

In every study the central influences in Christian faith formation have been people. When groups have been asked, "Who influenced your faith journey most?" the responses invariably are the names of persons with whom participants have had close relationships. As Paul says, "faith comes from what is heard," (Romans 10:17), and what is heard comes through the relationship, word spoken, and life lived by other people in our network of associations. Within the context of the faith-sharing congregation, people are nurtured in faith so their individual and collective acts of hospitality will inspire others. [5]

How do we learn to share our faith?

In every congregation people leave the pews and have countless contacts out in the world, but they hesitate to bring their own faith life into the open. When this happens, an opportunity is lost to participate in the ministry of invitation, and the evangelical flow is obstructed. This results in not inviting others. Laity needs to be equipped for faith sharing, so they can share faith and hospitality both in congregation and in the world.

Important tasks for the faith-sharing congregation are to help people understand the importance of open sharing; to identify their own faith story; and to encourage and help others tell of the doubts, the disappointments, and the loving care they have known along life's pathway. This is how persons are trained in sharing faith. [6]

Conclusion

A faith-sharing congregation is one in which there is an “evangelical flow.” People with passion for the good news flow into, through, and out from congregations in intentional ministry and mission. [7]

Many simple suggestions are given to aid churches in making visitors feel welcome, and to develop in them a sense of belonging. While many of the suggestions are not new, this book can help a congregation see its primary task of evangelism as an organized effort and make it more efficient. To see the aggregate personality of a congregation, as a visitor might, is an important insight to effective evangelism and church growth. It also stresses the importance of discipleship training and suggests various programs. [8]