

The Twenty Components of an Evangelistically Effective Congregation

By Scott J. Jones

God is a missionary God. God created the world and has not given up on it. God decided to use the Church to accomplish God's mission.

The Christian Church is a missionary organization. God's mission led to the formation of the Church so that the gospel would be preached, lives transformed, and the world saved from sin and the consequences of evil.

Mission is witness to the reign of God for the whole person and the whole creation. Action to bring about a more just society and to meet the needs of the hungry, naked, imprisoned, sick and poor is essential. Just as essential is the invitation to all persons to be initiated into the reign of God, the Christian life and the Church. Thus, while mission is larger than evangelism, it must always include evangelism. The biblical basis for this unified understanding of mission is the Great Commission read as a corollary to the Great Commandments (Matthew 22:34-40 and 28:16-20).

Evangelism, on my definition, is that set of loving, intentional activities governed by the goal of initiating persons into Christian discipleship in response to the reign of God. There are seven aspects of initiation: moral, experiential (conversion), theological (the creeds, especially the Nicene Creed), baptism into the church, spiritual gifts, spiritual disciplines (such as the means of grace: prayer, fasting, eucharist, worship, accountability group, social justice ministry) and faith-sharing.

As an integral part of its mission to praise, worship and serve God, a congregation should be a channel of God's love for the world, thereby loving God and neighbor in ways that are perceptible both to those inside and those outside the congregation. Genuine love is evangelistic. Genuine evangelism is loving.

How does one create an evangelistically effective congregation? Three truths will help put these 20 components into perspective.

- First, leaders of the congregation must make the conscious decision to do so. Of the following factors, 1, 2, 3 and 4 are the most important. If these are in place, the rest is just details.
- Second, leaders must pay attention to all of the factors. There is no single program, idea, or emphasis that can make a congregation evangelistically effective. Because evangelism is essentially relational, and relationships are multi-faceted, you have to be doing all these different things at once. The more effectively you do all of them, the better you are.

- Third, leaders must see the congregation as a system. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Excellence in one area depends on and also reinforces excellence in other areas.

Components 1 through 4 relate to a congregation's self-understanding and identity. Components 5 through 20 comprise a possible or typical journey from being an unchurched or pre-Christian person to being a committed, growing disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. Create and Sustain a Missional Culture

a. Each congregation should have a clearly defined, biblically based, simple and comprehensive statement of its mission which is known and owned by all of its leaders and most of its members. To be “biblically based” means it must be a contextually appropriate application of the mission of radically loving God and radically loving neighbors so they also become disciples of Jesus Christ.

b. Evangelism must have a high priority in the church’s self-understanding and have an impact on all aspects of its ministry.

c. All decisions must be accountable to the mission statement in both content and style.

d. Every member of the church family should be able to state the purpose of this congregation.

e. A missional culture is created and sustained best through preaching, prayer and Bible study and internal communication.

f. The behavior of clergy, church staff and lay leaders sets the norm.

Suggestions

Study the Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church in the Book of Discipline, 2000, ¶¶ 120-124.

Either reaffirm the denominational statement or write your own. Either way, make sure the leadership of the congregation has ownership of the statement.

Use the statement to measure everything you are doing. Repeat it at Board/Council meetings, at leadership retreats, in worship. As each group meets to plan for the future, the question needs to be asked if what they are planning is in alignment with the mission of the church.

Light a missional fire in your congregation by teaching Disciple, Christian Believer, or sending people on Emmaus or Volunteers In Mission teams

Resources

Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Zondervan, 1995.

For Scott Jones’ understanding of evangelism see his *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor*, Abingdon, 2003.

Weems, Lovett H., Jr. *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003. This book helps in understanding the importance of mission/vision statements.

Weems, Lovett H., Jr. *Church Leadership: Vision Team Culture and Integrity*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993

FaithQuest is a biblically based small group study created by the GBOD to help develop leadership who understand how to create and implement the mission and vision of the church.

2. Create and Sustain a Spiritual Culture

a. There should be an organized, sustained, prayer ministry interceding for pre-Christians.

b. We must rely on God's action and understand that the Church is being used by God as a means of grace.

c. There must be theological commitments compatible with evangelism evident among the clergy and lay leadership of the congregation. For example, some commitments to universal salvation lead to a lack of interest in inviting others to become Christians.

Suggestions

Form a prayer group to pray for pre-Christians by name.

Invite all the members of your congregation to list five unchurched persons they know and pray for them daily for two weeks.

Study United Methodist Doctrine, or study Christian doctrine through a program like Christian Believer.

Resources

Dick Wills, *Waking to God's Dream* is a helpful book.

Marjorie Thompson's *Soul Feast* is a good book about spiritual disciplines, but it needs to be supplemented with a book about mission.

See the list of books on United Methodist doctrine at the end of this handbook.

Subscribing to the Upper Room, either in print or by email is helpful. Go to www.upperroom.org/

3. Create and Sustain a Culture of Hospitality

a. The gospel is intended to reach all persons everywhere, crossing boundaries of race, age, nationality, gender and other cultural factors. Thus, every congregation should be determining which boundaries it should and can cross in the future.

b. Each congregation must in word and in deed offer genuine hospitality to all persons.

c. Despite your best research and planning, God will surprise you, so be ready. Read, mark and inwardly digest Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

d. The congregation should avoid or minimize bias with regard to race, economic class, marital status, age, educational levels and other factors that would exclude reachable persons.

Suggestions

Have someone who is not part of your church visit on a Sunday morning and write her/his experiences, evaluating the hospitality ministries of your congregation.

Have a task force evaluate the ways in which your congregation is already connecting with persons who are different—ethnically, economically, geographically, or in terms of age.

Find a way to ask unchurched persons in your community about your church. Ask them who goes there, who would be welcome there, and what kind of church it is.

Resources

Use the material from Igniting Ministries to evaluate your congregation's hospitality. In particular, the video "Tale of Two Churches" will sensitize persons to some of the issues involved. Show this video to Sunday School classes, committees, evangelism teams, trustees, ushers and all others who might be involved in hospitality ministries (that's all active members of your church!).

Small group resource *Beyond 30 Seconds: Developing a Welcoming Congregation*. Seven small group sessions developed by Igniting Ministry and designed to help church members improve skills in welcoming while developing a culture of hospitality.

Both of the above resources are available from Ks Area Resource Center 800-745-2352.

Contact the Conference office for information on Igniting Ministry training for local churches.

For Multi-cultural resources, see Stephen Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998).

Anderson, David A. Foreword by: Bill Hybels. *Multicultural Ministry:*

Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan , 2004.

McSpadden, Lucia Ann. *Meeting God at the Boundaries: Cross-Cultural-Cross-Racial Clergy Appointments.* Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2003.

Law, Eric H.F. *The Word at the Crossings: Living the Good News in a Multicontextual Community.* St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004.

4. Determine Your Target Population and Learn to Love Them Well

a. Given each congregation's social and cultural location and their limited resources of personnel and money, a congregation must focus those resources on a particular target population given to them as a reachable group of people. By necessity targeting one group will mean giving less attention to another group for the present, but successfully reaching one group will later open doors to reach other groups.

b. The church's leaders must make a clear decision about who the target population is. This could be defined by age, family structure, geography, income, race, immigrant status or other cultural factors. It will be influenced by the group(s) that the congregation is already reaching and the possibilities for connecting with other groups from that base.

c. The congregation's leadership must study this population so that they know the group's culture, its thought patterns, its needs, its hopes, and how the gospel might most readily be communicated to its members. The leadership should lead the congregation to love the members of that group as well.

Suggestions

Walk your neighborhood and speak with people about who is there.

Even in small towns there is often a tendency for long-term residents not to know about newcomers and how the community is changing. Speak with utility companies, the local school district office and others who may be more knowledgeable about what kind of people are there.

Study life patterns like traffic flow, businesses and other patterns that affect people's behavior in other areas.

Study generational changes and characteristics.

Resources

Percept Group, Inc. offers demographic data. Check them out at www.perceptnet.com. Some annual conferences have entered into arrangements with Percept where they can get demographic studies at a discount. Contact your conference office for help.

The United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries has an Office of Research that provides UM congregations with demographic studies. They are cheaper than Percept and have been improving in quality in recent years. Contact them at <http://research.gbgm-umc.org/>

American Demographics Magazine is a periodical resource on the characteristics of various generations.

Miller, Craig Kennet. *NextChurchNow.Com: Creating New Faith Communities*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2003.

Leadership from the Heart: Learning to Lead with Love and Skill. A ten-week study for small groups from the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.

5. Demonstrate Concern for Physical Needs and Justice Issues in the Community

a. The congregation as a whole, and especially identified leaders of the congregation, need to be active in the justice issues and physical needs of persons in the community they are trying to reach. Love must be concrete and embrace the whole person, including political issues where the Christian faith has a specific position to advocate.

b. Food banks, medical and legal clinics, employment services, community organizing, demonstration for political change, community development and other actions may all demonstrate the love of Christ to people.

c. Attention to the poor and marginalized is especially important.

d. There must be a constantly maintained connection between ministry to physical needs and ministry to spiritual needs (e.g., praying in the food pantry and inviting the poor to worship).

Suggestions

Evangelism means demonstrating God's love by word and deed. Sometimes people learn about God through doing, and volunteer in mission teams have been instrumental in converting persons.

If you have a food pantry, have someone working the pantry that is willing to invite persons to church. Then make sure you are truly hospitable toward such persons.

Develop a reputation in the community as "the church that helps people" through local mission projects, day-care services, etc.

Resources

Contact Habitat for Humanity. Their local board may well have a Church Relations Committee and be interested in input and participation by local congregations.

Annual Conferences often have committees or staff working with Volunteers In Mission.

Other opportunities in Kansas to volunteer: United Methodist Urban Ministries, United Methodist Mexican American Ministries, Grace Med Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty in Kansas.

Robert Harder gives regular legislative updates from Topeka.

6. Empower Laity to Witness Verbally to Their Friends, Associates, Relatives and Neighbors

a. All laypersons should understand themselves to be verbal witnesses for Christ (1 Peter 3:15-16). They are in contact with pre-Christian and unchurched persons and they are more effective witnesses than clergy

b. This witness can simply be talking about their church or inviting unchurched friends to come.

c. Programs such as Bring a Friend Sunday, Home for Christmas, Faith-Sharing and Witness may be helpful in giving laity confidence in verbal witness.

d. Three different types of faith-sharing are inviting, telling, and mentoring. All Christians can invite, some are able and should be encouraged to tell, and a few should be trained as mentors.

Suggestions

Find ways of helping persons learn to talk about what God is doing in their lives. Testimonies in informal worship times may be helpful.

Distinguish three levels of faith-sharing:

1. Inviting unchurched persons to attend your church. Everyone should do this. Everyone can do this.

2. Telling the story of what God has done in your life in ways that are appropriate, invitational and loving. Most Christians should learn to do this, but it requires providing them examples as well as encouragement. Find appropriate and effective ways to share testimonies.

3. Acting as mentor to someone struggling with issues of faith as they move through repentance (changing life's direction) and faith in Christ (entry into Christian discipleship). This is the gift of evangelism that some have and others do not.

Resources

Bring a Friend Sunday and Home for Christmas are programs with instructions available from the North Texas Conference of the UMC, www.ntcumc.org.

Kansas West has done the Coming Home for Christmas campaign in the past so they would at least be familiar with the concept. Many churches do the Bring a Friend Sunday ...nothing formal however. There are other churches who teach this concept through F.R.A.N. (friends, relatives, and neighbors) to help folks remember that they are to be inviting others to church.

Witness is a 25-week study of the Christian faith with an emphasis on sharing it with others. Developed by the General Board of Discipleship, it is available from www.discipleshipresources.org. More information is available at www.gbod.org/witness.

Faith-sharing, a book with videos for group study is available from

www.discipleshipresources.org and many United Methodist conference resource centers.

Groups like Alpha (www.alphana.org), Beginnings (www.cokesbury.com) and Emmaus (www.upperroom.org/Emmaus) develop small group leaders who might become mentors.

This We Believe is a Sunday School quarterly that provides 13 weeks of training in what United Methodists believe through their doctrines. By discovering what they believe about God, Jesus, Salvation, and grace, folks say that studying the Bible takes on a depth that they had not had before.

7. Achieve Visibility Among Your Target Population

a. Word of mouth will give your congregation a reputation that should be positive. This is the best method to achieve visibility.

b. The location and appearance of church buildings can be an effective way for unchurched persons to know you exist. Your facilities should be clean and well kept according to the community's standards.

c. Use appropriate advertising which might include yellow pages, radio, television, direct mail, website, banners, posters, and signs in the laundromat.

Suggestions

Have someone who does not live in your community ask if there is a church of your denomination at a gas station near your church building. See if the people working there know you exist.

Ask people in your community what sorts of people go to your church. Learn what your reputation is in the community.

If you need to put up a sign to tell people where your church is, consider relocating your church to where the sign would be.

If you are not re-locating, put up the signs anyway.

Advertise, advertise, advertise. Make it a priority in your budget. Use expertise from your conference office and the helps provided in the Igniting Ministry kits.

Use Christmas Eve or Watch Night services as evangelistic opportunities

Appearance means a lot. A safe and attractive play yard for children gives the message that the church cares about children.

An outdoor volleyball pit or basketball court says that youth are welcome.

Parking signs in the parking lot for visitors or parents with children gives the feeling of welcome.

Resources

Igniting Ministry. Go to the training. Read the material. Then do it.

The Church Ad Project is an Episcopalian ministry putting out high quality advertising material. www.churchad.com.

Callahan, Kennon L. *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.

8. Use an Appropriate Communication System to Invite Persons to Know Christ

- a. The congregation must use communication systems that are most effective in reaching the target population it is trying to address.
- b. One presumes that 21st century United States congregations cannot avoid using electronic media to reach persons outside the church and to enable authentic worship inside the church.
- c. Attention must be given to issues of language, images and the impact of particular words in specific communities in order to inculturate the gospel effectively.

Suggestions

Make your presence known in the local television and radio markets. In smaller towns it is cheaper. If necessary, develop a cooperative team of churches to buy ad space together.

Because few of us can afford a year-round presence, focus on the following times: just before Christmas, just before Easter, just after the beginning of public schools in the fall. Unchurched persons are most receptive to invitations at these times.

Advertising and digital communications can only supplement word-of-mouth invitations from real persons. These one-on-one conversations are the most important.

Have and use a website.

Resources

Igniting Ministry, www.ignitingministry.org.

Lumicon is a part of the United Methodist Reporter. www.lumicon.org.

E-zekiel web tool from UMCOM. www.umc.e-zekiel.com

9. Provide Adequate Parking, Signage and Facilities

a. For some contexts, a church needs adequate, off-street, paved parking, assuming 1.5-2.3 persons per car. This average may vary from one community to another. In some situations parking helpers may be needed to direct people to empty spaces.

b. In other situations, public transportation, church buses and ride sharing need to be considered. The basic question is how best to facilitate people getting to the site.

c. There should be adequate signage to help first-time visitors to find where they need to go. They should be able to find the nursery, rest rooms, sanctuary, information booth, and church office.

d. The buildings' architectural features should welcome everyone. Pay attention to flow of people, accessibility for disabled persons and other issues (colors, artwork, posted announcements) that make for a welcoming environment.

e. Your sanctuary or worship space should not appear to be full to the first-time visitor. In many places this means that it should not be over 80% of capacity.

Suggestions

Count your sanctuary's maximum capacity by allowing 22 inches per person and physically measuring the number of seats.

Count the number of parking spaces and multiply by 2.0. That is a rough estimate of your capacity at any one time. Send the trustees out to look at the parking situation 15 minutes after the worship service or Sunday School has started.

If your sanctuary is 80% full, you may not grow further. Consider an additional service or expanding the size of the sanctuary.

Have an outsider visit your sanctuary to see if he or she can find the rooms a first-time visitor would want to find.

Does your building's décor attract the people you are trying to reach?

Leaders of the church, including pastors, should take the worst possible parking spaces.

Resources

Jack Heacock has trained a number of persons in "One-Hour Consultations" that evaluate facilities and other issues.

Rev. Don Renshaw and Mr. Richard Hearne run Church Development and Finance Associates (www.cdfanet.org) and their Vision and Values Workshops have been very helpful to many congregations.

Igniting Ministry "Comfort Checklist" and "Walk-Through Assessment".

Callahan, Kennon L. Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983. He has a lot to say about the importance of parking

10. Welcome Visitors With Demonstrated Hospitality Measured by Perception of Visitors

a. There should be greeters at every possible entrance who are genuinely interested in helping. They need to be sensitive enough to discern those who are first-time visitors and would welcome special attention.

b. It is helpful if there is an information booth or other means of helping visitors feel comfortable and find what they need.

c. This point of contact is the first of four opportunities to get names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail. The others are Sunday School, registration during worship, and conversation after the worship service.

d. Following the worship service, laity should intentionally seek out visitors and welcome them.

Suggestions

Again, test this system by talking to first-time visitors about their experiences.

Visit with people who came to your church once and did not come back. Ask them why. Use open-ended questions like “We are seeking to be the best, most friendly church in our community. Would you please tell me about your experience with us?” Someone other than the pastor should conduct this interview.

Some small churches make the mistake of smothering first-time visitors making them feel uncomfortable. That is not hospitality, either.

In most settings, singling out visitors during worship embarrasses them rather than welcomes them.

What if a church used a system of roving “angels” whose job it is to greet people they don’t know?

Resources

Bring a Friend Sunday offers specific suggestions for hospitality training.

The Igniting Ministry kit (www.ignitingministry.com or Cokesbury stores, www.cokesbury.com) has resources.

11. Have Effective Nursery, Children’s and Youth

Ministries

- a. Your nursery should be brightly colored, inviting, safe and well staffed with repeated staff people each week.
- b. Periodic tests of your nursery's adequacy should be evaluated by a committee of young mothers.
- c. Make ministry with children and youth a priority in your congregation's programming. Enlist the best, most spiritually mature leaders in the congregation for this ministry.

Working with Youth

- a. Establish a Youth Council made up of youth members and adult members from the congregation. This group will guide and support your youth ministry program.
- b. Develop a long range plan for Sunday School (what *teachings* will youth learn from when they enter jr. high until they graduate).
- c. Develop a long range plan for UMY (what *experiences* will youth have from the time they enter jr. high until they graduate).
- d. Create a program that moves youth from gateway ministry (ski trip, fun events) to outreach ministry (professing, committed youth).

Nursery

Establish a committee of young parents. Bring in an outside consultant, if necessary to evaluate your nursery facilities. Let the parents tell you how to improve the nursery. Do whatever they ask.

Children

People quite frequently are 'shopping' for a church home that has strong ministries for their children and youth. A children's music program that works to have musical dramas gets people of all ages joining together. The music also 'evangelizes' the children as they have fun and learn various concepts of the faith through music

Resources – Children: Books are all available at www.Cokesbury.com

The Ministry of Christian Education and Formation from General Board of Discipleship

Safe Sanctuaries for Children by Joy Thornburg Melton

Keeping in Touch by Carol Krau

Out of the Basement by Diane C. Olson

The Spiritual Life of Children by Robert Coles

Resources – Youth: All available at www.Cokesbury.com

Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry from Discipleship Resources

Safe Sanctuaries for Youth by Joy Thornburg Melton

United Methodist Youth Handbook by Mike Selleck

The Godbearing Life by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster

Faith Forming Junior High Ministry by Drew Dyson

Sacred Bridges by Mike Ratliff

12. Worship Indigenously

- a. The three most important factors creating indigenous worship are music, music, and music.
- b. Other key factors include the pace and sense of formality of the service and the content of the sermon and stories told by the preacher.
- c. The bulletin should be user-friendly for pre-Christians (e.g., print out The Lord's Prayer).
- d. The criterion of true worship is not whether we've always done it that way before, but does the liturgy enable the people authentically to worship God.

Suggestions

Consider establishing a new worship service. Offering a different time may reach more people with busy work schedules or other conflicts.

Study benchmark churches (ones like you in size, geographic location or ethnicity) that are doing it better than you are doing it.

Learn how churches with blended music reach a variety of persons.

Find out which radio stations your target audiences listen to.

Gather a representative group of your congregation together and go through the hymnal to name the "old favorites" people wish they were singing. Note the diversity.

Resources

Lumicon (www.lumicon.org) is offering resources in digital worship.

Projecting hymns on a screen allows for the easy introduction of new songs. Be sure to get a license for using copyrighted material. For licensing, see Church Copyright License International, www.ccli.com.

Igniting Ministry's Media Warehouse www.ignitingministry.org

If people are interested in reading what younger people are looking for in a church the following books can help:

McLaren, Brian D. *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2000.

Webber, Robert E. *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002.

13. Get Names, Addresses, Telephone Numbers and E-mail

- a. Sometime during each worship service there should be a registration procedure that does not single out visitors but elicits feedback from all persons in worship.
- b. This is an opportunity for all persons in the church community to communicate with the church's leadership and staff.
- c. There should be spiritually mature persons in each section of the sanctuary who see it as their ministry to greet and care for newcomers they find near them.
- d. There must be a systematic, comprehensive and accurate record-keeping system for the constituency. When a person has been visiting for three months, you should know their names, address, phone number, e-mail, which Sunday School class they have attended (if any), which Sundays they have attended and which Sundays they have missed, and important information about their family life and needs.

Suggestions

Leaders of the congregation should observe the 3 minute rule—no one may speak to someone they know for the first three minutes after worship ends if there is someone they don't know present.

Resources

Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* has good suggestions here. Adam Hamilton's *Leading Beyond the Walls* is also helpful.

14. Preach Biblically and Evangelistically

a. Preaching should be well done and biblical. For United Methodists, this means in accordance with our doctrine—the way of salvation—creation, sin, repentance, justification, the new birth, assurance and sanctification.

b. Good preaching focuses on the intersection of the gospel with the lives and issues of the people. Assume a secular context.

Suggestions

Pastors should assume they can improve their preaching and should seek out continuing education opportunities and peer-review groups to do so.

Consider forming a peer review group to watch videotapes of each other's sermons and provide honest feedback.

Resources

Look at the resources for United Methodist Doctrine at the back of this handbook to get reacquainted with the basic themes of the way of salvation.

15. Communicate Effectively in the Sermon

a. In most contexts, this means without notes.

b. Proper use of media and drama may enhance communication of the gospel, but are not ends in themselves. Because evangelism is based on love, there is no substitute for knowing one's people.

Suggestions

For pastors: if you use a manuscript, reduce it to an outline.

If you use an outline, reduce it to 9 words

If you use nine words, memorize them and preach without notes.

16. Respond Quickly and Appropriately to First-time Visitors

- a. There should be a response made to first-time visitors by a layperson within 36 hours—either by telephone or in person, depending on the culture.
- b. At some point—perhaps toward the end of the first week—there should be contact with a pastor—letter or telephone call.
- c. The ideal model is to establish repeated, continuing contact with the same spiritually mature friend to help in the assimilation/discipling process.

Suggestions

Use Christmas Eve as an evangelistic service. Do not do communion (since it is not for outsiders). Then take a brochure to the homes of your visitors on Christmas afternoon.

If your members balk at spending Christmas afternoon visiting people who need a closer relationship with Christ, ask them “What is Christmas about, anyway?” This is the kind of decision that shapes a missionary congregation.

Resources

Bring A Friend Sunday, North Texas Conference, www.ntcumc.org.

17. Establish and Maintain Significant Small Groups for Seekers

There needs to be a clearly understood and programmed discipleship system in each local congregation. Think of it this way: if a non-Christian person comes to your church seeking God, do you have a system to help that person repent, commit her/his life to Christ, and grow toward Christian maturity? All Christians need to worship God every week, and so the gathered worship celebration is foundational. But persons are disciplined best in small groups where they can work out their spiritual issues in a more personal setting.

- a. Establish regularly scheduled Alpha groups, or some other program to teach the basics of the faith.
- b. There should be multiple discipling groups, including such things as Bible studies, Sunday School classes, Disciple groups, twelve-step support groups, mission teams, and food pantry volunteer groups.
- c. Every small group for seekers should include all of the aspects of initiation into the Christian life.
- d. Enable the seeker to connect with spiritually mature friends who nurture the person to a deeper relationship with Christ and the Church.

Suggestions

You might offer a month-long class for new persons that could then become a Sunday-School class

While no one can sponsor an AA group, building a relationship with one through shared facilities and other efforts might reach that group of persons.

The Sunday School was originally an evangelistic outreach to children without a church home. Could it be so again?

Resources

The Alpha program is the best one I know for teaching the basics of the faith to seekers. Information is at www.alphana.org. However, it works best if the pastor teaches the main session. The material often needs to be adapted to a United Methodist audience for some of the sessions.

Beginnings is a new program from Abingdon Press. I am impressed with what I have seen of it, and anxious to hear the experiences of congregations that use it.

Disciple Bible Study has not always focused on converting pre-Christian persons, but it has sometimes happened.

18. Give Appropriately Timed Invitations to Commitment

a. Be sure to ask for a commitment when the time is right, with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15-16).

b. Communicate the community's expectation of what the Christian life is like in its fullness: moral, experiential, theological, church (baptism, membership), operational (gifts of the spirit), disciplines (worship, communion, fasting, prayer, Bible study, works of mercy, etc.), and faith-sharing. Do not be guilty of false advertising.

c. Stress the sacramental/liturgical aspects of baptism, confirmation and joining the church.

Suggestions

Each congregation needs persons other than the pastors who are skilled at leading persons to Christ.

This could be as simple as having the courage to ask, "Are you ready to commit your life to Christ?" or "Have you thought about joining the church?"

19. Establish and Maintain a System of Discipleship for New Christians and New Members

The system of discipleship does not end at conversion. We believe that conversion is the start of the process of salvation, but it continues for the rest of one's life.

a. Have high and clear expectations for membership in the body of Christ.

b. Have formation processes that regularly nurture those attitudes and behaviors with systems of accountability.

c. For United Methodists, make commitments to prayers, presence, gifts and service a reality. I teach church + 2: Every Christian should be in worship every week (unless physically prevented by health reasons) and should be involved in two small groups—one where he or she is spiritually fed, and the other where he or she feeds others in some way.

d. Spiritual Gifts studies can also help new members find a place of belonging and serving.

20. Establish and Maintain Small Groups for Growth in Discipleship and Service

a. Every believer should be involved in an intentional small group activity to continue discipleship growth. Possibilities include Emmaus, Disciple, Christian Believer, Stephen Ministries, Lay Speaking, Wesley Groups, and Sunday School. These will probably overlap with groups for seekers.

b. Each group should understand its function in relation to the missional culture of the congregation.

c. Each small group must play some role in the missional tasks of evangelism, nurture and service. Ideally (as in the Wesley Group model) each small group has a complete overview of mission in five parts: prayer, study, fellowship, accountability and service.

Suggestions

Start new Sunday School classes.

Strengthen the structure of your classes so that each class has a hospitality person and an outreach person. The outreach person's job is to contact and nurture potential members of the class.

Strengthen all the small group ministries of your church, so long as each one has the five parts of the Wesley Group model

Convert existing groups (like the choir or ushers) to a small discipleship group by adding whichever ones of the five functions are not present.

Spiritual Gifts studies are good for discipling and helping people discover places where they might serve best.

Resources

Dick Wills, *Waking to God's Dream* gives some description of the Wesley Group model.

Covenant Discipleship Groups are offered by www.discipleshipresources.com.

Slaughter, Michael. *Spiritual Entrepreneurs: 6 Principles for Risking Renewal*. Nashville: Abingdon Press,

Spiritual Gifts Studies:

Serving From the Heart: Finding Your Gifts and Talents for Service.

Available from Cokesbury

Network: The Right People...In the Right Places...For the Right Reasons. WillowCreek.

Common Misconceptions of Evangelism

A number of misconceptions about evangelism are held by laity and clergy alike. While many of them have a grain of truth contained in them, all of them militate against clear understandings of the church's task in this area. Some of these misconceptions are included in the literature about evangelism and infect many of the programs and ideas currently being proposed to local congregations. Yet, the theological commitments regarding evangelism described in the previous chapters will correct many of these misconceptions. Some of the most popular, including a brief reminder of what is wrong with them are as follows:

Misconception #1. Evangelism is primarily about saving the institution through getting new members, preferably those who tithe. Too many church leaders are preoccupied with institutional maintenance, forgetting that the church lives and dies by its faithfulness to its mission. Church growth and financial health are results of effective evangelism, but they should not be the primary goal.

Misconception #2. Evangelism and missions are two separate activities, best cared for by different committees. Mission describes everything that the church does for those outside itself, and so almost everything it does has a missional component since outsiders are often participants in its activities. Evangelism is an essential component of mission. Thinking of mission and evangelism as separate misconstrues what they are. Assigning them to a committee as if the other activities of the church are not missional or evangelistic is inaccurate as well. Every committee of the church should have the mission of the church, including its evangelistic components, at the forefront of its thinking.

Misconception #3. Evangelism is something optional that we can do when we get around to it. Evangelism is central to the "euangelion", the gospel and is never optional.

Misconception #4. Evangelism and social action are opposed to each other. In pursuing one, you exclude the other. Evangelism is a way of inviting persons to participate in God's coming and present reign of justice, including social justice. Social action is a way of demonstrating the present reality of that reign in a way that invites both oppressors and the oppressed to join.

Misconception #5. Evangelism is the pastor's job; don't ask or expect laity to do it. Laity are usually more effective evangelists than pastors. It is the pastor's job to empower the laity to be evangelists. Part of empowering them is to be involved in the evangelistic process personally. But the main point of their work is holding up the vision of a missionary church engaged in evangelism and then providing training and systems that enable lay persons to initiate others into Christian discipleship.

Misconception #6. Large, suburban, upper-middle class congregations are the primary places pastors should go to learn how to build successful congregations. Many such congregations are in fact models from whom principles and practices can be learned. At the same time, each congregation must learn how to be evangelistically effective in its own context and with the resources it currently has. Many small congregations serving poor, urban and rural are also evangelistically effective and we need to use them as models as

well.

Misconception #7. Television, radio and other digital media necessarily distort the gospel and should not be used for its communication.

Digital media have their limitations which must be recognized. They are often impersonal and limit the message to a sound bite. At the same time, their vast reach and their acceptance by modern cultures means that they are inescapable tools for communicating the gospel. But they are not sufficient in and of themselves.

Misconception #8. Evangelism is something needed by those immigrants and we need to do it to them so they'll be good Americans.

Evangelism is needed by all non-Christian persons. However, many immigrants are already Christians and they need invitations to join congregations as baptized sisters and brothers. The goal of evangelism is not to make persons into good citizens, but to help them become what God wants them to be. Evangelism that is motivated by and guided by love will be much more sensitive to asking about the real needs of all sorts of persons. Paying attention to immigrants is a good thing, provided it is done out of love.

Misconception #9. Crusades, revivals and the ministries of para-church organizations are the best examples of evangelistic practice. Churches tend to reify the practices of the past. Someone once said that the seven last words of the church are "We've always done it that way before." It is my view that while these practices have some usefulness, effective congregational evangelism is far more important.

Misconception #10. We have too many churches already (we are short of clergy) and we don't need to start new ones. Churches that lose their sense of mission usually die. Other churches are affected by population shifts. Many denominations have too many congregations in areas where they once had vital ministry but where there are far fewer people today. At the same time, as new cities are built and new ethnic groups arrive, most denominations should be rapidly starting new congregations aimed at building up new communities of faith.

The motivation for evangelism is given in Charles Wesley's hymn:

Freely to all ourselves we give,
Constrained by Jesu's love to live
The servants of mankind. . . .

O let our faith and love abound!
O let our lives to all around
With purest lustre shine!
That all around our works may see,
And give the glory, Lord, to thee,
The heavenly light divine!
--*Works of John Wesley*, 7:704

Books on Evangelism for Lay Leaders of Congregations

- Brueggemann, Walter
 1993 *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storyed Universe*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Hunter, George G., III.
 1992 *How to Reach Secular People*. Nashville: Abingdon.
 1996 *Church for the Unchurched*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Jones, Scott J.
 2003 *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Outler, Albert C.
 1996 *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources.
- Rhodes, Stephen A.
 1998 *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Ruffcorn, Kevin E.
 1994 *Rural Evangelism: Catching the Vision*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Stewart, Carlyle Fielding, III.
 1994 *African-American Church Growth: 12 Principles of Prophetic Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Warren, Richard
 1995 *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Resources on United Methodist Doctrine:

- Campbell, Ted A.
 1999 *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Collins, Kenneth J.
 1997 *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon. [BY 3750 .C63 1995](#)
- Gunter, Stephen, Scott J. Jones, Ted A. Campbell, Rebekah L. Miles, and Randy L. Maddox.
 1997 *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation*. Nashville: Abingdon. [BY 387 .B6 W47 1997](#).
- Jones, Scott
 2002 *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center*. Nashville, Abingdon.
- Maddox, Randy.
 1994 *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Kingswood Books. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Outler, Albert C.
 1996 *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources.
- Wesley, John.
 1975- *The Works of John Wesley*. Bicentennial Edition. Nashville: Abingdon. Many of his works are available online at

<http://wesley.nnu.edu>.

Yrigoyen, Charles, Jr.

1999 *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*. Nashville: Abingdon

2001 *Belief Matters: United Methodism's Doctrinal Standards*.

Nashville: Abingdon. BY 1592 .Y74 2001

Resources for Children and Youth

Coles, Robert

2000 *The Spiritual Life of Children*, T & T Clark Publishers

Dean, Kendra Creasy, Ron Foster

1998 *The Godbearing Life*. Upper Room

Dyson, Drew

2003 *Faith Forming Junior High Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon

Discipleship Resources

2003 *The Ministry of Christian Education and Formation*

2004 *Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry*

Krau, Carol

2003 *Keeping in Touch*. Nashville: Cokesbury

Melton, Joy Thornburg

1993 *Safe Sanctuaries for Children*. Nashville: Discipleship

Resources

2003 *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources

2004 *Save Sanctuaryies for Children/Youth*. VHS or DVD Nashville:

Discipleship Resources

Olson, Diane C.

2001 *Out of the Basement*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources

Selleck, Mike

1999 *United Methodist Youth Handbook*. Nashville: Discipleship

Resources

Ratliff, Mike

2002 *Sacred Bridges*. Nashville: Abingdon Press

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