



New Ideas for Growing Churches

NET Results

Disciple Making: Evangelism

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Relational Evangelism: Facing Up to Jesus
by Robin Trebilcock

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I am in the preliminary stages of planting a new faith community in South Australia. It will be based in a café owned by the local church in the run-down, old, commercial heart of Port Adelaide. I plan to use a tabletop-sized cell-group model, reaching out to unchurched people to multiply. The team involved in the set-up has a key concern – evangelism. What will work in the difficult climate of the postmodern mission field?

The Problem of “Losing Face”

In Adelaide recently, I made a presentation at a national conference in which I engaged the delegates in a Listening Triad exercise.[i] I arranged enough local, public sites where the delegates could linger, listen, and observe. Not all of these venues were of equal status. A few were glamorous precincts with seaside cafes and restaurants. Others were local shopping centers and schools. I encouraged the local delegates to choose the more lowly sites so that the “out-of-towners” could have the more glamorous locations. And that’s when my plan disintegrated! I had a rebellion on my hands. None of the delegates would go to the lesser sites. “Face” and “status” had more power than reason.

These were people from a church that has “heart” spirituality as a major element of its DNA. However, they were preoccupied with social image, relationships, and status. A psycho-social analysis of society distinguishes people as being driven primarily by their “head,” “heart,” or “gut.” In the modern era, “head” values have predominated. But in the postmodern era, “heart” values are growing in significance. In some ethnic groupings, such as those from East Asia or the Mediterranean, this attitude is normative. Western businessmen and diplomats dealing with people in those regions have been coached in relationship building, face saving, and observing the appropriate protocols for acknowledging status. This has implications for contemporary evangelism.

If face saving and status loom as a serious block, how would a “heart” congregation engage in mission?

How should any church, attempting outreach in a postmodern world, evangelize a neighborhood with more ordinariness than glamor?

My first church was in Redfern, a rough, inner-urban part of Sydney, Australia. Two families might live in the same street in almost identical social circumstances. One would be doing as well as possible at making a go of life with their money, family relationships, and work. The other would be dysfunctional with domestic violence, substance abuse, petty crime, and boom-and-bust finances. Most of the church families were of the first kind. There was no way that they would reach out to bring Christ to their neighbors. They experienced living the Christian life like walking a tightrope. One slip and they might crash. Like the conference attendees described above, no amount of theological reasoning could overcome their relational block. A different faith dimension is needed to give people courage to risk their status, face, and self-esteem so they can become evangelists.

The problem is not a new one. Jesus faced the same issue in his time. He urged his followers to forgo status and choose places with lower status with the expectation that God would call them to “come up higher” (Luke 14:7-11). Yet our modern, rationalist reading of this text fails to comprehend how radical this is for “people of the heart.” Being found “down lower” and being called and accompanied to “come up higher” is where a relationship-oriented, face-saving, status-conscious, “heart” person experiences the grace moment out of which conversion may occur.

Relational Evangelism

The report of the conversion of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9) is a biblical case study that demonstrates the following five steps of relational evangelism. It records the interplay of relationships, status, and “face” among the person being evangelized, Jesus, and the church.

1. Discerning and responding to relational yearning.

To be open to relational evangelism, a person needs to yearn for deeper, more satisfying relational values than those of his/her current lifestyle. In the biblical case study, Zacchaeus went into an encounter with Jesus and the crowd because of

- His yearning for a relationship with his local faith community - of being “included.”
- His separation from the fulfillment of his yearning – his marginalization from that community.

Discerning the yearnings, contrasts, and blocks in contemporary society is the necessary pre-evangelism task of relational evangelism. The church needs to self-consciously gather what Jesus discerned in a glance in Jericho. Listening Triads are a way of discerning people’s yearnings through overheard conversations in which people share their ordinary, everyday relational blocks, contrast values, and make value judgments.

2. Experiencing status inversion in a relational encounter.

When a person is touched by an experience of what he or she yearns for, the person's current life situation is experienced as status inversion. This is amplified - almost parodied - in Zacchaeus's case. Here is a man who could make or break financially and politically most of the people in Jericho (thus with high status in the world's eyes). After climbing a tree, he is pointed out by Jesus in front of the accompanying crowd. At this moment, his experience is a traumatic realization of his marginalization. This experience is status inversion.

For example, suppose a person living in a tough neighborhood yearns for the relational value (and fruit of the Spirit) of kindness. When she or he encounters kindness in that life situation, the survival skills that are a necessary protection from begging, soliciting, or mugging—"normal" in a harsh and cruel world—contrast with the kindness and accentuate the blocks to living with kindness in the current situation. The person's status as "streetwise," for the moment, has no currency. Status is turned upside-down. This is status inversion. Along with the yearning for kindness is the hope that the next experience will be an invitation to "come up higher."

3. The grace moment – entering a world with yearned-for spiritual values.

When Jesus decided to stay at Zacchaeus's home, he redefined the experience of being incorporated as a son of Abraham: moving it from a position at the bottom of the tree into Zacchaeus's home environment. The next step in relational evangelism is for the evangelist to enter into the usual environment of the person being evangelized, in order to confront its context of world values with spiritual values. The crowd, from whom Zacchaeus had been estranged, then (reluctantly) followed Jesus to his house, and their presence became a metaphor for his newfound inclusion.

Relational evangelism in a postmodern world will not convert until the yearned-for "fruit of the Spirit" moves from the encounter where the contrast with the "works of the flesh" is highlighted. It must move into an ongoing experience in the everyday world of the one being evangelized. Random acts of kindness need to be followed up with "kindness" cell groups that can foster kindness in places where it had previously been absent or limited. The Mosaic congregation (www.mosaic.org) in Los Angeles with worship in a nightclub and others with similar secular venues have an advantage here. Jesus did not say to Zacchaeus, "Come down! I am going to the synagogue with you." Jesus took the synagogue with him to Zacchaeus's house.

4. Radical affirmation of a new relationship with God.

Zacchaeus's public statement of intention shows his response to God's grace, experienced as being included in God's chosen people. There is nothing pious about his intention . . . no commitment to prayer, Sabbath worship, or Bible reading. He states how he will fulfill and exceed the requirement of the Jewish Law in his work as a tax collector and businessman. He declares his intention to change his relational values in the midst of the environment where he had practiced his former ways.

In contemporary relational evangelism, a person's conversion is affirmed by a public declaration of the changes in relational values that will be evident because of his or her adoption of "fruits of the Spirit" over "works of the flesh." "Public" in post-Christendom times no longer means testimony given from the altar of the church but rather "policy changes" announced at home, at work, and to a group of people in spiritual relationship through Jesus.

5. The conversion of the Church.

In this case study Zacchaeus is not the only one converted. The crowd, representing the sons of Abraham/synagogue/church, is also converted. In practicing relational evangelism, the evangelist gets converted by her or his relationship with Jesus, as well as the one being evangelized. In relational evangelism, the status and self-esteem of the evangelist and the group sponsoring the outreach will be challenged by the situations and relationships they must enter to carry out their mission. The church itself moves from aversion, through fear, to radical affirmation of a new relationship with God.

In the end, the affirmation comes from Jesus . . . not the community. He affirms the new, inclusive relationship between Zacchaeus and the crowd. They are all, now, "sons of Abraham." Did the crowd enfold Zacchaeus into their fellowship? This has been left deliberately as an open but difficult question that the hearers, including ourselves, must face in order to affirm that we have been converted by Jesus to be relational evangelists.

Here is the lesson for today: People no longer yearn to be part of the church and for the most part are deeply suspicious of it. Their yearning is for different spiritual values, and this kind of yearning is where relational evangelism must begin.

The Relational Evangelist

The Church's yearning to be with Jesus provides the motivation needed for relational evangelism. We need to recover and foster a sense of the real presence of Jesus.

The early Church had to work hard to overcome relationship blocks. Experiencing the real presence of Jesus made it possible. The gut/intuition/action people were drawn into evangelism through mystical revelation. The head/rationality/word people were drawn into evangelism through practicing the imitation of Christ. The heart/relational/status people were drawn into evangelism through announcing the Name of Jesus. Jesus was really present with them as co-evangelist. The "Name" was not a description but a definable presence.

How can we cultivate a relationship with Jesus as real presence that can grow to be intimate and conversational? Juan Carlos Ortiz[ii] showed me the following insights. In being with Jesus, we should

- Look for a relationship that is present and effective in life, not just in religious activities and church meetings. Such a relationship is in the present tense rather than biblical/historical. In any situation, Jesus gives strength and guidance, and in any relationship, Jesus is present to bring grace and transformation.
- Be intimate, conversational, and attentive to Jesus so that the relationship grows and matures in the same way as any other close friendship should. Such a relationship is open and transparent to other people, and it leads to their meeting Jesus also.
- Practice “being there” for Jesus as much or more than expecting Jesus to “be there” for you. Ortiz observes that much prayer resembles the requests of a child to a parent: “Give me!” “Help me!” or “Show me!” Adult relationships are much more mutual and reciprocal in giving and receiving but not as a business transaction, i.e., giving “something for something.”
- Contemplate Jesus as we might gaze in adoration and reverie on someone we love.

As I proceed now with the new church plant at Port Adelaide, practicing and teaching relational evangelism will be a priority. The evangelists and those we intend to evangelize will, more and more, be postmodern people for whom relationships and a relational approach are more important than the doctrinal, enlightenment approach of the modern era. The agenda will include the following:

1. Becoming aware of and comfortable with the real presence of Jesus

Group life will foster the discovery and familiarization of potential evangelists and new converts with the persona (Name) of Jesus, using Ortiz’s insights, reinforced with teaching, discussion, and contemplation.

2. Adopting three or four spiritual values that contrast with prevailing worldly values

Cultivate these values so that they become incorporated in the DNA of the plant. Determine which “works of the flesh” will be contrasted by “fruits of the Spirit” by using Listening Triads, social issues reporting in the area and demographic analysis.

3. Developing relational evangelism tactics and training evangelists

Design encounter, engagement and affirmation tactics for each contrasting values scenario, and “call” people to train to become evangelists. For now, detail for this stage is sketchy and will happen as part of the plant’s planning and development. The affirmation tactics include group life that strongly supports the new relational values of the converts.

4. Structuring “status inversion” as part of the governance of the plant

Status needs to be recognized in terms of the sincerity, warmth, helpfulness, and genuineness of the person’s relationships, rather than by formal positions or the world’s pecking order. It is the strength and support of these relationships, especially the relationship with Jesus, that will overcome the blocks and fears that worldly status raises.

Postmodern evangelism will have to work in a time when attitudes toward organized Christian religion are hostile and difficult. Many Christians, as a consequence, may feel at a loss to know what to do and may even feel corralled and ineffective. New challenges call forth new responses. This article outlines one such practical response.

Notes

[i] Tom Bandy, *Moving Off the Map* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), Page 191.

[ii] Juan Carlos Ortiz was a popular author and speaker in Australia in the mid-1970s. These insights are from two taped lectures on “The Presence of Jesus” he gave at that time.

Is Evangelism a Dirty Word or a Faithful Word in Your Congregation?
by George W. Bullard, Jr.

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Is evangelism a dirty word or a faithful word in your congregation? Not sure? Try this exercise. Ask a dozen people—one at a time—to define evangelism, to indicate how they feel about it as a core emphasis and effort of the congregation, and to describe what role they personally play in the evangelism efforts of their congregation.

Use these questions to obtain answers and feedback.

- What is evangelism, or how would you define the word evangelism?
- How important is the work of evangelism to a congregation? Is it essential, reasonably important, or just something that needs to be done by those congregations who feel a special call to the work of evangelism?
- What roles have you played in your life in the evangelism efforts of the congregations with which you have been connected? What role do you currently play?

Go ahead. Ask them now. Then come back and read the remainder of this article.

What Answers Did You Get?

How did the exercise go? Do the people know how to define evangelism? Do you? Do they define evangelism as efforts that focus on pre-Christians and assume that they need a Christ-centric, faith-based journey? Or, do they see evangelism as new-member recruitment, new-member assimilation, or reactivation of inactive members?

Is evangelism a dirty word in your congregation or a faithful word? By dirty I mean that it is not kept up; it suffers from a lack of care and maintenance. Evangelism is a dirty word if it is not a high priority within your congregation. Care of existing members may be a much higher priority than inviting new people to Christ's party.

By faithful I mean that your congregation has an unwavering belief in the importance of the work of evangelism. It intentionally chooses to regularly invite people to engage in a Christ-centric, faith-based journey that will transform them spiritually and eternally. The work of evangelism is seen as equally important as the congregational care ministries and disciple-making efforts to develop followers of Jesus Christ as mature believers.

When Is Evangelism a Dirty Word in Congregations?

- When evangelism is a dirty word in congregations, some of the following issues likely abound.
- Evangelism is seen as the exception to the norm in the congregation. The term evangelism and the work of evangelism are not typically a part of regular activities of the congregation.
- People confuse the concepts of evangelism and new-member recruitment. They view being pre-Christian and being unchurched as the same thing. A churched culture is assumed. Evangelism is seen as sharing the word of Christ with those uninformed in, and those who have departed from, his ways.
- Evangelism is seen as the process of reactivating inactive members of the church. This was actually the most popular understanding in a study I read several years ago within one denominational family.
- Evangelism is seen as the process of inviting new members to become leaders in the congregation. Considering how closed the positional leadership groups are in some congregations, it might just take on something of an evangelistic effort or spirit if they invite new members to become leaders. But I don't think this quite makes it.

The confusion over clearly defining evangelism acts as a barrier to empowering the congregation in a redevelopment or transformation effort. Congregations cannot begin new, clear initiatives among emerging people groups if they do not know why, who, or how to embrace people searching for a faith journey.

There is theological chaos that fails to see a Christ-centric, faith-based journey as the most important journey in which a person can engage. This speaks to a disbelief that a Christ-centric, faith-based journey is essential for a full spiritual relationship with God.

Some congregations emphasize religious pluralism that defines "being Christian" as a religious organization with which one may be identified, as opposed to a spiritual experience and movement that is essential. If a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not essential, then evangelism may not be necessary.

Too few clergy and lay leaders have a full understanding of evangelism and a passion for the work of evangelism. Perhaps many congregational leaders relate this to the lack of an active spiritual journey. Or, perhaps it is related to the fact that we involve our leaders in management activities that make any time they have for spiritual growth mundane or shallow.

When Is Evangelism a Faithful Word in Congregations?

- In congregations where evangelism is a faithful word, several of the following characteristics are probably celebrated.
- Evangelism is seen as the process of introducing persons to a faith journey focused on accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Congregational members regularly seek to build relationships with persons that may lead them to embrace this journey for themselves. Introducing others to Jesus and encouraging them to accept him as Lord and Savior is a core value of the congregation.
- Evangelism is seen as mirroring a lifestyle that impacts and draws people to desire a relationship with Jesus. This is known as lifestyle evangelism and honors the spirit of the song “They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love.”
- Evangelism finds its voice in fulfilling the Great Commission. The act of going out of our congregational context into the world to spread the Good News of the salvation available through Jesus Christ is one of the core values of these congregations.
- Evangelism has a clear identity. It is obvious to the congregation that evangelism differs from new-member recruitment and new-member assimilation. In evangelism’s clear identity is also an understanding that reactivating inactive members and inviting new members to participate in leadership positions are part of the ongoing assimilation activities of the congregation and are not within any definition of evangelism.

When evangelism is a faithful word it may well be because the congregation has a clear understanding of the theology of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). A theological stance that borders on religious exclusivism exists that says there is something unique in a relationship to God through Jesus Christ that cannot be found anywhere else. Religious inclusivism and pluralism are acknowledged as standard views in some quarters of North American Christianity, but they are seen as less faithful to the heritage and hope of the gospel message.

Is care of your church’s existing members a much higher priority than inviting new people to Christ’s party?

Questions for Your Congregation about Evangelism

Congregations must consider the following questions about evangelism.

1. Where is evangelism as a part of the core values, theological foundations, and historical ethos of our congregation?
2. What intentional methods of inviting people to a Christ-centric, faith-based journey characterize our congregation?
3. What are the characteristics and unique spiritual needs of the people attracted to what our congregation has to offer?

4. How can we use these understandings to develop authentic, genuine spiritual and strategic practices that will invite and include people in a Christ-centric, faith-based journey?
5. Which people within our congregation have clear gifts, skills, and preferences that lend themselves to intentionally inviting and including people in a Christ-centric, faith-based journey? What can we do to give permission to and support these people in engaging in the work of evangelism?
6. What can we do to include many people in our congregation in prayer, hospitality, financial, and permission-giving support of the people more directly involved in the work of evangelism?
7. Are we ready for the transitions and changes that may occur in our congregation as we successfully include new people in our fellowship who express great zeal for growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?

Questions for Your Denomination about Evangelism

Denominations must consider the following questions about evangelism.

1. Where is evangelism as a part of the core values, theological foundations, and historical ethos of our denomination?
2. What intentional methods of inviting people to a Christ-centric, faith-based journey characterize our denomination?
3. Do we define evangelism as a core characteristic of a congregation or as a choice a congregation may make?
4. How do we identify, motivate, and support those congregations that appear to have the gifts, skills, and preferences to engage in ongoing evangelism activities?
5. How do we assist those congregations that do not have a theology or methodology for evangelism to see this as a core part of their work as congregations? Although not all our congregations will see themselves as Great Commission congregations, many approaches to evangelism can still be affirmed and practiced in Great Commandment congregations.
6. How do we infuse into our clergy's theological education and ministry preparation the appropriate concepts of evangelism? How do we assist our colleges, universities, divinity schools, and seminaries to help students learn appropriate approaches to evangelism?
7. What do we do to support calling to denominational staff roles the people who understand the necessity of the work of evangelism?

Growing God's Mission with People on the Margins
by John Flowers and Karen Vannoy

Vannoy and Flowers are the married co-pastors of Travis Park United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas. In their nine years at Travis Park (www.travispark.org), this urban congregation has been redeveloped by lay involvement in ministries with the area's homeless and other marginalized persons.

Have you tried Fuller's "Church Growth Evangelism" without any growth? Tried "Evangelism Explosion" but no explosion? Have you done your denomination's revitalization programs and your church still isn't revitalized? And having tried all this and more, are you finding it difficult to continue to think positively, as Schuller says we must?

Nine years ago, we were appointed to a dying, downtown church, confident that we could turn it around. After years of trying everything, we were exhausted mentally and spiritually, and the church was still stuck in its plateau/decline spiral. All the time, right outside our church doors, was the change we most needed to make. If you want to pastor a church filled with transformed people, consider ministry with the marginalized.

Just outside our church in the heart of downtown San Antonio were the homeless people of the street. In the past, they were invisible to us on Sunday mornings, intruding occasionally by asking for a handout. Our greeters were instructed to keep them away from our front doors because we knew they made people uncomfortable, especially visitors. Some young adults in our church wanted to begin Café Corazon, serving a hearty breakfast to anyone who was hungry and regardless of ability to pay. When we initially decided to start serving a free breakfast, we actually wondered if the homeless people would even come into the building, since they had been "not welcome" for so long. Building up trust was difficult for the first dozen volunteers that began this ministry. On our first Sunday to serve breakfast, about 40 people showed up. Five years later, on an average Sunday morning our church will have 120 volunteers feeding 200 people. Another 50-55 people will be visiting one of our three clinics that morning, another 40 visit the clothes closet, and another 40 take showers.

**If you want to pastor a church filled with transformed people,
consider ministry with the marginalized.**

Preparing the Soil and Sowing the Seeds

We were not naive enough to believe that everyone would wholeheartedly embrace the changes this ministry has brought to the congregation. After all, most of our churches are solidly middle- and upper-middle-class, mainstream America. We are the ones who have set those boundaries that place the marginalized where they are! Still, the responses and the opposition surprised us. We heard frequent questions like, "Must we have these homeless people here on Sundays?" In the initial stages, some in the congregation wanted these ministries to take place Monday through Saturday, anytime but Sunday mornings. Because we had been in decline for almost fifty years, a lot of dysfunction became entrenched in our congregational life. At first we spent most of our

time and energy in dealing with conflict in the church and meetings that didn't matter, paralyzed by a lack of money and people.

We then spent two years just addressing our need for change. We had both been trained in Edwin Friedman's systemic approach to healthy congregations. Additionally, our entire leadership read and discussed over several months *Kicking Habits: Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches* by Thomas Bandy. This step was critical in two ways. First, it prepared the congregation for the coming changes needed in worship. Second, we were all profoundly uncomfortable around that much poverty and need; some members left the church over it. Working through our own vision for our future and preparing the leaders for the fallout are the steps that enabled us to survive and thrive. The church members who stayed, and those who have come since the ministry began, do so because we believe we are embodying the basic teachings of Jesus, the core of the gospel.

Jesus was all about being in community with the marginalized of his day. Women, tax collectors, prostitutes, those suffering from mental illness, the mixed-race Samaritans, Roman government officials, and the poor—just to name a few—were all marginalized. Texts that helped us define ourselves include

- Jesus with Mary and Martha in the home of Lazarus
- Jesus with Zacchaeus
- Jesus with the woman who anointed his feet with oil
- Jesus with the demoniac
- Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well
- Jesus with the Roman official
- Jesus with the widow and the two copper coins.

We began framing worship thematically around the biblical stories of the marginalized. We preached their stories in the context of today until their stories became the identity of the congregation itself.

The Real Changes

Most church members want to help others, so asking Christians to reach out to those less fortunate is easy. But the continual stretch for all of us is to accept the ministry we receive back, making this a ministry with the marginalized and not just to them. The difference is crucial. A young woman tells how she was changed, almost from the outset, through a guest in the Sunday morning Café Corazon at our church.

“I had been involved in planning Café Corazon from the first, but I actually missed the first Sunday because my mom had just died. I returned to town the second Sunday after we opened and was pouring syrup in a bottle, and my tears began flowing. A homeless man asked me, ‘What’s wrong?’ I simply told him I was sad because my mom had just died. He put his hand on my shoulder and said he was sorry. I realized at that moment that my sorrow did not have to be mine alone but that others would share my pain and my joys. It was one of those transforming moments that completely got my attention.”

People report that now they are less judgmental, more welcoming and inclusive, “not just to the people who are ‘easy’ to accept, but those that are really hard.” Others claim their spiritual path has changed completely, and they can’t give enough back. Over the last five years, our church has been led into ministry with people who suffer from physical and spiritual hunger; men, women, and children in poverty; those who suffer with mental illness, as well as chemical, sexual, and emotional abuse; and those who love them. We have learned a lot about poverty and the working poor. Our homeless guests are only half of the people we serve every Sunday. Getting a free meal or eyeglasses, seeing a doctor, and receiving new clothes will extend the budgets of poor families whether they have a home or live on the streets.

It is a continual stretch to accept the ministry we receive back.

The deeper changes happened when the poor and homeless began to worship with us. It is the work of the Spirit as to exactly how and why this began to happen. But this much we know for sure:

We treated our guests with respect, dignity, and equality of power.

We changed our music drastically. We have a band at the 11:00 a.m. celebration service; at that time we only do contemporary music (which is generally familiar to the people on the street). Choral music and the organ are used at our early service.

We first invited the homeless to come to worship. Then we began to tell them, one on one, that we needed them to be in church with us. We were too white, too privileged, and too churchy to be real. We were incomplete as the people of God without them. Nothing equalizes us as powerfully as being able to worship together. The proximity of presidents and paupers in the same headline on Sunday morning brings about profound changes for both.

Not only has the numerical decline in our congregation reversed, but more important, the spiritual apathy has disappeared. We no longer are easily drawn into petty disagreements, but instead we examine our own assumptions about ourselves and the world. Through our ethnic and economic diversity, we have learned to embrace theological diversity as well, no longer arguing about theology but trying to understand how we can best follow Christ. We no longer think we are in charge of our future, staying overly busy with committees and church structures; we know God is leading us. Café Corazon has developed into Corazon Ministries, a “one-stop shop” for poor and marginalized persons to receive help and hope while our volunteers (some poor and some rich) learn how to share in power and community with people who have very little.

Ministry with the Marginalized Transforms Church

It makes no difference if your church is large or small, conservative or liberal in theology or politics, white collar or blue, urban or rural . . . Ministry with the marginalized provides the best chance to become a full, vibrant, and healthy congregation. In an era when homogeneity is known to be a factor in church growth, ministry with the marginalized may sound risky. Yet to seek out and be in community with those whom our society has pushed to the margins will actually strengthen your local church, not to mention being much closer to the biblical model of koinonia. No matter where your church is located, you are surrounded by people who live on the cultural and societal margins. Simply put, marginalized people are those our society considers undesirable, unattractive, or unwanted.

Who are the marginalized of our day and your community? It is important to begin to name them out loud.

- immigrants
- those who suffer from mental illness
- chronic street people
- situationally homeless
- those who suffer from chemical abuse
- those who suffer from alcohol abuse
- those who have been in prison
- divorced persons
- single parents
- people who are dirty
- children who have been sexually abused
- children in special-education classes
- African Americans
- Latin Americans
- Arab Americans
- Muslims
- those confined to a wheelchair
- prostitutes
- high school dropouts
- minimum-wage earners
- those who are addicted to gambling
- Jewish Americans
- mixed-race persons
- gays, lesbians, transgendered, transsexuals
- those who suffer from hunger
- the poor
- women and men who have been physically or emotionally abused

No one local church can minister with every marginalized person. Begin by identifying the marginalized persons who are closest to your congregation by geography or relationship, and involve your current members in the process of identification. Many of our churches share one identity: The demographics of our neighborhood are very different from the demographics of our church. Talk with people. Go door to door for the purpose of discovery. Ask questions. Look around you Monday through Saturday; whom do you see? Use informal networks in conversations with your friends. Then talk to the friends of those friends. Talk to people who don't go to church; talk to mental-health workers, child-protection workers, and adult-service workers. Don't ask, "Whom would my church be willing to accept?" Stretch your comfort zone and select volunteers from your congregation who are willing to be stretched as well.

Our volunteers (some poor and some rich) learn how to share in power and community with people who have very little.

Most of our churches are either stable or in decline, struggling with what to do. We say we want to grow and attract new people, but our focus is just too narrow. As we move further into our own ministry at Travis Park, ministry with the marginalized has redefined who we are. More than any other single thing we do, it is our ministry with those on the margins that has spread like wildfire through the community and changed the heart of our church.

Even if ministry with the marginalized did not produce growth, it is what Jesus calls us to do. If we are to change the world through our local churches, then we must begin somewhere.

If your congregation is unhealthy, deal with the sickness. No significant change can happen until the pastor and leaders recognize the need for change.

Identify what group of people in your community is not being reached by the church. Involve others in the process. Figure out what the people in your target group need, not just what you want to do for them. You can't know this for sure without asking the people you're trying to serve.

From the beginning, plan for the target group to worship with and be part of the church. Without this, you're just a social-service agency.

Make changes in worship that will bring in the people with whom you want to be in ministry.

Forget about homogeneity; be ready to embrace diversity.

Does Your Church Have Side Doors?
by Todd Pridemore

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A couple of years ago, a woman in our congregation sensed a calling to invite a friend and her family to church. However, this church member knew it was very unlikely that this unchurched family would respond to her invitation to attend the Sunday morning worship service. The woman's children participated in an outreach-oriented basketball league at the church, so she invited the parents to involve their two children in that activity too. The kids enrolled in the basketball program, and everyone loved the experience. Nearly two years later, three of their four previously unchurched family members were baptized as new members of our church.

Another church member, a young father, met a new neighbor who did not attend any church in the community. The neighbor had moved to this area from another state and had virtually no friends nearby. Although he grew up as a Catholic, he did not consider religion and spirituality to be a significant part of his life. The church member took advantage of a fishing tournament sponsored by his church as a way to involve his new friend. After participating in two fishing tournaments over a period of four months, the neighbor began attending a Bible discussion group. He now attends church regularly, where he is exploring Christianity in ways he never has before.

Still another church member, a young woman, worked with a young lady who had not gone to church since childhood. The church member talked with her coworker about church and religious issues, occasionally inviting her to attend some of the "less threatening" activities at the church, such as social events and women's activities. After months of being invited, the coworker finally attended a women's brunch at the church and enjoyed it immensely. After several more months of church-related conversations and invitations, the young lady finally attended a Sunday morning worship service. This woman felt God's presence through the worship service as well as through the relationships she had developed with her coworker and others at the church. She felt compelled to investigate the Christian faith on a deeper level, and she was recently baptized.

These three stories focus on the lives of previously unchurched people who did not come into the church through the "normal" entry points. Their first visit would not have been to the worship service or Sunday school hour. Instead, they first entered through "side doors" into the church by becoming involved in church-sponsored activities. We live in an age in which a large percentage of Americans live almost completely outside of the influence of Christianity and the church. According to the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey, nearly 30 million Americans – more than double the number from ten years earlier – responded "none" to the question, "What is your religion, if any?"* Thankfully, in the midst of such a discouraging situation, most churches have a great desire to be evangelistic. Congregations yearn to see people's lives impacted and changed by the message and life of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, many of these churches struggle with actually reaching and influencing unchurched people. One of the biggest reasons why churches struggle to be effective is that they

expect previously unchurched people to simply walk through their front doors on Sunday mornings and join the church. In reality, this rarely happens. Although anything is possible, and God still works in mysterious ways, most unchurched people simply will not enter into a church's life through the main entry points that are usually available, such as worship services, traditional Bible studies, prayer meetings, or Sunday school groups.

The many reasons for this situation vary from church to church, community to community, and individual to individual. Some people consider church to be boring or irrelevant to their lives. Others have had bad experiences with church in their past and have written off church because of the pain it caused them. Many Americans believe the myths that churches are only interested in taking money, that all church people are hypocrites, or that ministers cannot be trusted. The individuals who hold these or other negative views of church life are much more likely to enter church for the first time through a "side door," rather than through the "front door."

You may be asking yourself, "What exactly is a 'side door' into the church?" Practically speaking, a side door is any nontraditional entry point through which a person or family might become involved in a church. Usually, these side doors are not Bible studies, prayer meetings, Sunday school classes, or even worship (although in many communities, if a person does enter church for the first time, it is usually by attending a worship service).

Side doors can be created by any activity that holds a common interest for both the current church members and unchurched people in your community. I have found sports and recreational activities to be great outreach ministries that provide multiple side doors into church life. In our church, volleyball and basketball leagues offer great entry points for children, teenagers, and adults. In addition, other recreational activity possibilities are fishing tournaments, scrapbooking parties, movie nights, and aerobics.

Almost any type of activity can be used to create side doors into your congregation. Specific hobbies, book clubs, social groups, recovery groups, support groups, or almost any other activity or interest can qualify. These types of activities are successful outreach opportunities for churches because they not only meet a need or an interest for current church members, but they also provide a relatively "safe" opportunity for unchurched members to test being involved in church life.

How to Introduce "Side Doors" in Your Congregation:

1. Make outreach and evangelism a priority in your congregation. Do everything possible to help your congregation understand and support the church's commission to "go and make disciples." This comes through weeks and months of teaching and inspiring members of your congregation through sermons, Bible studies, newsletter articles, website(s), email, and other means of communication. A significant part of this education process is in helping your congregation understand that most unchurched people will simply not walk through the church's front door on Sunday morning.

2. Identify interests within your congregation that might be shaped into effective side doors of entry for unchurched people. In other words, find out what your church members enjoy doing apart from attending worship and going to Bible study. Encourage people to think outside of the box; there is almost no activity that is so secular that it cannot be used to create a side door into your congregation. For example, if your congregation has one or more members who enjoy racing remote-control cars, encourage them to create an outreach ministry centered around this hobby. Likely many other people within your community are not involved in a church but would be interested in participating in this activity.

3. Equip potential outreach-ministry leaders for success. Make sure everyone understands the primary purpose of this new ministry: reaching unchurched people. It is extremely easy for this new activity to evolve into nothing more than a fellowship group or social club for church members, instead of fulfilling its purpose of reaching unchurched people. Help the ministry leaders plan their activities so that each gathering will include at least one spiritual component. This can be as simple as offering a prayer at each session, or as direct as someone sharing his or her personal faith story and giving those in attendance the opportunity to respond.

4. Make sure unchurched people know about the new opportunity. The most effective means of involving unchurched people involves your current church members personally inviting their friends, neighbors, coworkers, family members, and others to participate in the new activity. Personal invitations are the most effective way to involve others! In addition, you may want to provide some general publicity in your community about the opportunity. Consider utilizing newspapers, radio stations, billboards, information fliers, newsletters, websites, or other means of communication in your community to spread the word. Specifically, think about where people who have a particular interest go to pursue that interest. It may be a particular store, restaurant, website, or other forum. Investigate how you can advertise in one or more of these forums your newly created opportunity for them to participate in something that they already enjoy. For example, it would be wise to publicize details about the new remote-control car group at local hobby shops.

5. Evaluate the ministry. Once the new ministry has been launched, take time to evaluate it. This should be done after your very first session and then again in the weeks and months that follow. Ask honest questions: “Are we fulfilling our purpose?” “Are we reaching whom we want to reach?” “If we are disappointed in the results, should we continue the ministry?” “How can we be more effective in ministering to those who do attend?” “What is the next step?”

6. The next step. Once you have created a new side door into your church, it is important to think about how to most appropriately invite the non-church members involved in that activity to consider becoming disciples of Jesus. This may be an irrelevant issue if your side door ministry is structured so that those who come are already given the opportunity to investigate Christianity and respond as they feel led. However, many side doors are just the first of many steps in the process of making disciples in our world today. The most significant thing to consider is what can be done so that those unchurched people who have entered your side door will have the opportunity to experience Jesus and respond to God as they feel led to do so.

*Mark O'Keefe of Religion News Service, "The Growth of 'Nones': More Americans claiming no religion," Baptists Today, Jan. 2004.

The Church That's Continually Opening New Doors
by Dale E. Galloway

Galloway, a pastor for more than thirty years, author of more than a dozen books, and a popular speaker, has served as dean of the Beeson International Center for Biblical Preaching and Church Leadership, one of the schools of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

The church's first Biker Weekend raised a lot of eyebrows. The senior pastor, Dr. Bob Huffaker, more than fifty years old, personally rode one of the sixty-four motorcycles involved.

For a few church members this was too much. Some asked pointedly if praying over a motorcycle was "desecrating" God, the church, or their holiness tradition. Bob replied with the same line he's used repeatedly over his fourteen years as pastor there: "We've got to be a church where lost people matter most." He wanted to create an experience that made a leather and dog-rag wearing crowd feel welcome. He wanted to demonstrate the love of Christ and win a fresh hearing for the gospel message.

By 2005 Biker Weekend at Grove City Church of the Nazarene (www.grovecitynazarene.org) was more than an established annual event. It was the talk of the entire town of Columbus, Ohio. (Grove City is a southwest suburb of Columbus.) Church people went everywhere, from bars to motorcycle shops, to invite bikers to take part. Anticipating that the church facility couldn't handle the anticipated crowd, the church took the bold step of renting Columbus Crew Stadium.

The official buildup started on a Saturday, culminating in one of the largest-ever crowds for the church's Saturday-evening service, followed by a cookout at the home of Steve Combs, an associate pastor. "It was great to see nearly 200 bikes parked in Steve's yard," stated the church's website as it provided ongoing coverage of the weekend.

As early as 7:00 on Sunday morning, bikes began rolling in toward the staging areas. The church body came out in mass to prepare for all the bikers that were expected to participate. At noon two parades, one to the east and one to the west, made their way around the I-270 perimeter to Crew Stadium. Everyone was excited to see a helicopter overhead taking pictures as the group made its approach down the final stretch of the highway.

At the stadium, the church choir sang praise, worship, and "Sweet Home Alabama." After one biker was awarded a \$1,000 door prize, eight Harleys roared to life and brought a company of Marines on stage so church leaders could honor and pray for them. The service also included some serious moments of prayer for the bikers and challenge for them to welcome God into their lives.

In typical pattern, Bob gave full support to Biker Weekend but didn't lead it himself. In fact, the whole concept of Biker Weekend wasn't even his own. It was a wild idea from Steve Combs. At first everyone was apprehensive, but Bob championed it and was willing to take any heat.

"When I first suggested that we do something for bikers," Steve recalls, "Pastor Bob jumped at it." He told me, "I'll get the board behind this one"—and he did. Then as Biker Weekend grew for

now eight years running, "he wasn't threatened," Steve says. Nor did Bob feel the need to be the primary preacher for the Saturday-night service that came out of the biker ministry. "He's got an evangelistic heart and loves to see people saved. He could see we were rescuing a lot of people and so he's been our greatest supporter," Steve says. Indeed, even in its first year of existence, some 200 made a commitment to Christ at the Saturday-night service.

Bob explains it this way: "One of the best things I've done here is to bring good, competent people around me—people better than I am, talented people with a heart for our DNA as a church."

Always Looking for Another Open Door

Biker Weekend symbolizes in many ways the entire ministry of Bob Huffaker, during his tenure as senior pastor from 1991 until his retirement mid-year 2005. While he took a clear role as senior leader, he was always on the lookout for ways to encourage and empower others in ministry, especially as they opened new doors that would connect people with the church and its Lord.

"He's a cheerleader for every ministry," says Diane McNeilly, the church's pastor of assimilation. "He pats you on your back, and supports you in every way, and speaks well of you in front of other people."

Why did the church grow year after year during Bob's time there, becoming one of the largest in its denomination? "Probably because he allowed us as staff to come up with our own plans, and then he'd offer critique and coaching," Diane says. "That freedom and creativity is huge for the whole staff here, as we see new ways to meet needs of members, first-time attenders, and people we haven't yet reached."

Those values have a positive trickle-down effect on the members as well. "Pastor Bob led the staff on a quiet campaign to empower people to lead underneath us—to take them under our wings, and train them to be stronger leaders," she says. "It's been incredible to see a movement like that emerge." Diane, for example, has developed about twenty lay leaders in her assimilation ministry.

Other big front doors to the church have included a childcare ministry that started as people in the church noticed a need in the community. This led to an entire preschool wing, which has become the church's front porch, funneling families into the life of the entire church. The church's preschool and elementary-school ministries are vividly symbolized by a large indoor playground, far more extensive than found in any McDonald's, which was strategically placed so that many worshipers cannot get into a certain section of the sanctuary without passing it.

When someone's ministry grows, flourishes, and gets the limelight, Bob couldn't be happier. "A lot has to do with your own security," Bob explains. "As a church you do whatever it takes to reach the most people, not being threatened that others get the praise. I have to be secure in who

I am. I need to remember is that it's not about me; it's about God. Otherwise I fall into the trap of fearing that people will like 'them' more than they will like me."

Started with an Enlarged Heart

Bob wasn't always like that. Back in 1984, he went to David Yonggi Cho's church in Korea, the world's largest church. It has a solid focus on reaching lost people and leans heavily on a healthy network of small groups. What Bob experienced there had a profound impact. "It stretched me to think bigger." As the church's sixth senior pastor, he also was appreciative of the big dreams that had been built into the DNA of the church, from its founding pastor [I was blessed to serve in that capacity] through others. He and I first met in 1994 and have been friends ever since. "All the pastors before me have been good and solid people," he says.

Before coming to Grove City, Bob also saw through other churches the power of participative worship. So he transitioned the church he was serving into a more contemporary worship style. The church immediately began to grow. "In that atmosphere we began to attract younger families and unchurched people," he says. "It had a lot to do with our choice of musical instruments."

At that time it was unusual for a denominational church to embrace more contemporary worship styles, but Bob was willing to work through the challenges raised by longtime saints. "We were determined to be a church where lost people mattered most," he says. Bob brought that value to Grove City, where it was not met with nearly as much resistance as in his previous church.

Likewise, early on Bob discovered the spiritual power that comes through being a praying church. "God put in my heart to learn a lot about prayer," he says "If a church I serve was going to be a growing church, it had to become a praying church." For many years he has followed the personal discipline of trying to pray an hour each day.

How People Skills Help You Achieve a Big Dream

Through the years at Grove City, Bob has worked with a wide range of staff and lay leaders. He has repositioned many of them to find their greatest point of ministry effectiveness. Steve Combs was brought on to do small groups, but Bob kept helping him find outlets for using his gifts of evangelism, preaching, and love for motorcycles. Brady Wiseheart started in one role, and now as young adult pastor he leads a Sunday-night service. The church's longtime executive pastor, Don Bowman, was initially the youth pastor.

Don and others note Bob's genuine love for people, his sense of humor in working with people, and his gifts of leadership that find the right person needed for each new door God opens for the church. "When you meet him, it's so evident that he cares for you," Don says. "If you find him anywhere besides the pulpit, it will be with key leaders in the church and the city."

"I've known Pastor Bob for a long time, but I don't know anyone who seeks God the way he does," Don adds. "And Pastor Bob means it when he says, 'It's always about presenting Christ to the lost.'"

Becoming a Church Where Lost People Matter Most

There were scary moments for staff and congregation through Bob Huffaker's fourteen years at Grove City Church of the Nazarene. Most involved stepping into the unknown, such as becoming one of the only churches around with an indoor playground—or sponsoring a biker weekend. Another time Bob championed a vision to see 100 people baptized in one weekend, and it happened. Several building expansions have been needed along the way, which likewise took faith to challenge people to make major financial investments.

"It comes back to the DNA of this church," Bob says. "Lost people matter most around here, and that determines what we do. If what we're doing doesn't help us reach lost people, we're not going to do it."

Grove City Church of the Nazarene is all about opening doors, especially to the unchurched. "Since our primary goal is to reach those further away from God, it's nearly always in our mind," Bob says. "We're always looking for another avenue to expand the Kingdom of God."

As Mark Fuller became the church's seventh senior pastor, Bob had a hand in helping select him. He also offered him some simple advice. "Talk about vision," Bob says. "Don't ever give up the vision." With a heart for lost people so deeply ingrained in the life of the church, it will be hard not to do so!

Warren Bird assisted with the research and writing of this article.

Demographics That Make A Difference By Tom Bandy

Tom Bandy is the president of Easum, Bandy, and Associate

Demographic research is one of those things that church leaders talk about but rarely understand. It bears magical promise to clarify all planning and focus all mission, but it leaves most church leaders even more confused and uncertain than before. Basic information about your mission field is ignored because church leaders don't know how to get it or what data to gather. Expensive demographic research often stays hidden in the filing cabinet because leaders don't know what to do with it. Here is a brief guide to demographic research that makes a real difference to your mission planning.

There are four basic definitions that you need to know:

Mission Field: The region of mission God places most directly before any church, defined by the average distance church and local community members are willing to travel to work, shop, or play.

Demographic: One of many overlapping publics within your mission field defined by age, gender, race, culture, relationships, income, occupation, education, mobility, geography, or religion.

Lifestyle Group: Smaller, overlapping publics in your mission field defined by relational attitudes, political perspectives, aesthetic tastes, predictable patterns of behavior, or habits of consumption.

Affinity Group: Even smaller, overlapping publics in your mission field, which may involve people from multiple demographics and lifestyles, but which share a particular enthusiasm, need, ultimate concern, or behavioral priority.

Here is the planning matrix in which what is broadly called "demographic research" can be effective. If you do not do "demographic research" within this matrix of planning, it will be a complete waste of time, money, and effort.

Step 1: Clarify your congregational consensus for core values, bedrock beliefs, motivating vision, and mission purpose.¹ Make sure these boundaries for creativity and expectations for behavior are embedded in every leader of the church.

Step 2: Survey your own congregation to obtain a percentage breakdown of the members and participants in the demographic categories listed above. Study the lifestyle groups from resources identified below, and begin to identify which groups are represented in or missing from your church.

Step 3: Discover the publics beyond your church, not to judge or evaluate their lives, but to understand how they live and behave differently from you and from one another.

Imagine you are using three levels of magnification on a spiritual microscope to look deeper and deeper into the internal makeup of your mission field.

a. Demographic research studies the mission field in the broadest, most abstract diversity. Use the data from the U.S. Census.²

b. Lifestyle research breaks the data down further according to attitudes and behavior. Combine data from the U.S. Census; other municipal or social research from retail, educational, health-care, and social-service sectors; information from private companies like Percept3; and your own congregational listening.

c. Affinity research studies the variety of local interests and behavior unique to your context. Rely on conversations with local or regional media leaders, municipal planning boards, and your own intentional listening.

Step 4: Embrace the public for whom your “heart bursts.” Carefully define or describe that group of people whom you urgently, passionately want to connect to your experience of Jesus Christ. Wait for God to direct your heart, then pray for that public constantly.

Step 5: Customize tactics. Adapt program, resources, and personnel deployment in whatever ways best connect with your mission target. Learn whatever skills are necessary.

Step 6: Prioritize assets. Rearrange the budget, redesign facilities, and acquire technologies to best deliver the resources and leaders to your target public. Raise funds specifically for mission.

The real power and stress of demographic research is that it forces a church to look deeper into its own soul at the same time that it sees the mission field more clearly. The real challenge is not to discern whom you can or will help . . . but whom you desire to embrace as a brother or sister in Christ.

Demographics

You can easily obtain basic demographic information about your mission field from the U.S.

Census website in all the categories listed above, except religion. Obtain this last information from other nongovernment websites on religion.

- Type “US Census” in the “Search” area of your browser. Choose “Census 2000 Gateway”.
- Click on “Enter Street Address” near the top of the Census 2000 Gateway homepage.
- Enter your church address in the fields provided. Click “Go”.

- A screen appears below the address. Select “County Subdivision”, “Census Tract”, or “Block”. Click “Go”. (Note: You may wish to investigate all three. Once you have printed one, click the “Back” arrow on your web browser to return for the others.)
- Click “Map It”. The map pops up. You will save and print this later. For now, verify that you are looking at your locality. Then close the screen.
- Click “Go”. Search results are listed at the bottom of the screen. You will see categories for “Reference Maps”, “Thematic Maps”, “Quick Tables and Demographic Profiles”, and “Population and Housing Detailed Tables”.

You will want to save and/or print the following documents:

- Under “Reference Maps”, click the indicated map. Print one or more versions as needed.
- Under “Thematic Maps”, click “Total Persons” to see population density. Print. Then click “Back” on your web browser to return to the previous page. Then click “Percent of Persons Who Are White Alone” to glimpse cultural diversity. Print.
- Under “Quick Tables and Demographic profiles”:
 - *Click “DP1 Profile of General Demographic Characteristics”. Print it. Then click “Back” on your web browser to return to the previous page.
 - *Click “DP2 Profile of Selected Social Characteristics”. Print it. Then click “Back” on your web browser to return to the previous page.
 - *Click “DP3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics”. Print it. Then click “Back” on your web browser to return to the previous page.
- Under “Population and Housing Detailed Tables”, click “Census 2000 Redistricting Data” for further insight into racial/cultural distribution.

Together these tables provide basic information about age, gender, race, culture, relationships, income, occupation, education, mobility, or geography.

Lifestyle Groups

The diversity of our time and your community is so broad that you cannot simply assume that all people in any given demographic, living in a particular mission field, necessarily share similar attitudes, tastes, or behavior. There are three ways to find out.

First, read about the lifestyles found in North America. Two of the most helpful books you should read include *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches* by Tex Sample (Westminster Press) and *Nine American Lifestyles* by Arnold Mitchell (Warner Books).

Mitchell describes four broad kinds of people in nine distinct economic or education groups.

- The Super-Successful, including those for whom life is overflowing;
- The Principle-Oriented, including those whose lives are fulfilled or who believe fulfillment is a realizable possibility;
- The Status-Oriented, including those achieving success, striving to maintain success, or struggling to climb the ladder of success;
- The Action-Oriented, including those making a living and those for whom experience is more important than success.

Sample describes three kinds of cultures in nine lifestyle categories.

- The Cultural Left, including those passionate about personal growth, diversity of life experience, and social conscience;
- The Cultural Middle, including those who are successful in life, conflicted about priorities, and striving to advance their families;
- The Cultural Right, including those who value traditional respectability, work hard to earn a place in society, and desperately cling to survival.

These categories are not meant to be exhaustive but to inspire you to study and describe the people currently in your church and those who are actually living in your mission field.

Second, talk to municipal leaders, local and regional media observers; corporate retailers; health-care providers; social-service executives; and anyone whose work in research, products, and services demands close observation of future trends in your community.

Third, deploy your own listening teams into the mission field. Gather focus groups to reflect emerging trends. Contrast the recreational, shopping, and family patterns you see around you with other areas in your city or region.

Affinity Groups

The affinity group is the smallest, but also the most significant, unit of study for your church planning. These are the people united around a particular enthusiasm, concern, need, or behavioral priority. That affinity may seem good or bad, healthy or destructive, or anything in between, but it is one thing that holds a group of people together even across demographic and lifestyle boundaries.

The only way to discern the teeming variety of affinity groups in your mission field is to deploy your own listening and observation teams in the community. They need to mingle wherever the public is gathered, listen and observe, debrief their insights and reflections among themselves and between teams, and reality-test their observations with other local leaders.

The Key to Effectiveness

Effective mission today is motivated by a “heart burst” of love, not by an obligation to a demographic. Therefore, while demographic data inform your mission tactics, your mission is designed around smaller and more concrete lifestyle groups or affinity groups. Nobody loves a demographic. That is an abstraction. People can love a lifestyle or affinity group. They are real.

Similarly, nobody visits a worship service or participates in an activity because they belong to a demographic . . . but they will do so because they share a lifestyle or an affinity with the real people who are involved.

This means that no substitute exists for the risky work of actually, personally getting out among the many publics within your mission field to talk with them, share their experiences, appreciate their differences, and come to love them as Christ loves them. Along the way you will need to step beyond your normal aesthetic tastes, comfortable habits, and friendship circles in order to sample new food, experience different music, and talk with strange people.

Why would anyone do this? Marketers and retailers do it in order to increase profits.

Researchers do it in order to deliver relevant products. Politicians do it in order to develop public policy. Social services do it in order to deliver better caring programs. Christians should be no less daring and disciplined, because they have something to give away that is far more important than all of these things: Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. See previous Net Results articles on this topic: “Future Storytelling As a Way to Visualize a Congregation’s Spiritual Strategic Journey” by Bullard (July/Aug. 2001), “Cracking the Genetic Code: How Leaders Create a Culture of Mission in the Local Church” by Breuninger (Feb. 2001), “What on Earth Is a ‘Core Value’ and Why Do I Need One?” by Bandy (May 2000), “Your Vision Will Give You Your Map” by Galloway (Oct. 2000), “Do You Really Want to Catch a Biblical Vision?” by Bandy (Sept. 1999), and “Clarifying Our Mission, Vision, and Values” by Easum (Oct. 1997). Some of these articles, plus others, are in the Net Results reprint *pac Planning, Visioning, and Changing for the Future* (order by choosing “Practical Resources” on www.netresults.org or phone 806/762-8094, ext. 198).

2. Some other countries also offer helpful statistics. For example, Canadians have excellent demographic and lifestyle research available at www.statcan.ca (obtain resources, such as the extensive Canada Yearbook in print or digital versions, from order@statcan.ca or 800-267-6677).

3. Contact Percept at 800-442-6277 or www.percept.info.

Reaching Beyond
by Dale E. Galloway

Galloway, a pastor for more than thirty years, author of more than a dozen books, and a popular speaker, has served as dean of the Beeson International Center for Biblical Preaching and Church Leadership, one of the schools of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

Can you imagine a church sign that reads, “People Exactly Like Us Welcome”? I saw one in a magazine recently. I hope it was a joke.

One of the greatest church leaders I’ve ever known lives by the opposite stance. He always seems to be asking, “Can our kind of church reach the kind of people found in our community?” And he’s never fully satisfied with the answer. He is constantly leading his congregation to reach beyond whatever it has done to date. He also stretches his church to reach beyond its present experience of God, meeting God at new, deeper levels.

I believe this pastor’s passion to “reach beyond” explains much of the pulse behind the church’s heart for its community,

Each time I visit the church, God’s blessing on it is immediately apparent. The Holy Spirit is at work as leaders and congregation flow in obedience to Jesus’ mandate to reach their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and beyond (Acts 1:8). The church is reaching its city for Christ, and also is mentoring pastors in its denomination from one end of the country to another.

It comes as no surprise that the church has become the largest in its denomination—not just in its home country, but also in the world. Nor is it surprising that a church with such a great passion to “reach beyond” is located near the largest city on the continent, an intense cluster of people serving as the locomotive of the country’s commercial, financial, and industrial interests.

Have you guessed the city yet? It’s neither metropolitan New York, Los Angeles, nor Chicago. The church I’m describing is not even in North America. It’s in Campinas, Brazil, 50 miles outside of Sao Paulo, a megalopolis of 18 million souls.

The church is named Campinas Central Church of the Nazarene. For some 20 years, Dr. L. Aguiar Valvassoura has been senior pastor. Two years ago, I mentored his son Flavio through the year-long Beeson Pastor Fellowship.

Each time I visit the church and the Valvassoura (val-va-SOAR-ah) family, I come away challenged to see God do the same kind of things in whatever community I serve in the United States. Here are the ways I see this church “reaching beyond”—and the questions it presses me to ask myself.

How Are You Reaching Beyond?

Experiencing God: Even as a cross-cultural guest, I experienced God through the worship at Campinas Central Church of the Nazarene. The music is really well done, ranging from a first-class orchestra to a soft rock group that came out of the church. It played in a recent citywide youth festival that drew up to 40,000 people.

The pastor sets the pace as a leader who keeps reaching beyond, passionate that the church will touch God in worship. Leaders at the church speak of adoring the living God, and both the music and the preaching invite people to that level of discipleship. “The message of the cross never gets old,” says Flavio.

The preaching is always grounded in the Bible and practical—a preaching that transforms lives.

In addition to Sunday worship services (two in the morning and two in the evening), Monday night the sanctuary is filled with young people in a service adapted to a college-level crowd. Tuesday night may feature a healing service with a time of anointing. Thursday night may have a service to help strengthen marriages and family life.

The point is not to have people coming night after night but to find something that engages everyone and then stretches them to reach beyond their present level.

The church also has a growing number of small groups, as one more way people can “be the church” to each other and can see God work in practical ways.

For your church and mine: How important is it for us as leaders to personally touch God afresh and then to put priority on helping others to do so? How diligent are we in providing meaningful options that help people encounter God at their point of need? How practical are we in showing how the Word of God provides help and hope for whatever people face in day-to-day life?

Building a Foundation of Prayer: Flavio encourages his people “to develop a life of prayer as individuals, family, and church.” They may offer many times of prayer during a worship service. This is a church unashamed to continually pray for God’s blessing on other people. And they welcome it: people come forward by the hundreds to receive prayer.

For your church and mine: Would an outsider sense that our church truly depends on the power of God to work through prayer? How much confidence do our prayers convey that God does indeed answer prayer?

Loving Babies: Pastor Valvassoura has huge leadership responsibilities and communicates a holy boldness in his spiritual challenges to his congregation. Yet part of him has remained tender, able to show love to a baby and empathy to its parents.

Brazil is a country bulging with youth, with the average age being 19. Likewise the church has a high percentage of children, youth, and young parents. If God has surrounded the church with thousands upon thousands of youth, then this church wants to excel in reaching out to that group. Its current building project, for example, includes a McDonald’s-like play area for small children.

For your church and mine: What is our community's biggest demographic group? How are our churches reaching out to it with the love of Christ? To what extent are our church financial priorities devoted to activities specifically connected with this group? How passionate are you and I to lead our churches to reach beyond our present level of engagement with this group?

Developing Need-Meeting Ministries: The church sponsors at least 50 need-meeting ministries. A version of Promise Keepers called "Men of Honor" draws thousands of men. A ceramics class may draw 600 women. Smaller classes help people with everything from overcoming addictions to improving parenting skills. A recent four-week seminar helped people with job hunting, with practical emphasis like crafting a resume. The theme behind all of these ministries is to help people where they are.

Above all, the church understands the culture, fitting it where appropriate such as in Brazilian culture's love of food, family, and music. Likewise, the culture is highly relational, so the church is also strongly relational in everything it does.

For your church and mine: How alert are we to needs that the church could meet in Jesus' name? How empowering are we of people who have a heart for a specific ministry, but need encouragement and training? How well do we understand and work with our own local culture?

Helping My Denomination: In the United States, it is fashionable to downplay denominational labels if we sense they are a stumbling block to those we're seeking to reach. Sometimes that tendency leads us to become so locally focused that we lessen our commitment to a more global mission through our denomination or fellowship.

The Brazilian church doesn't run from its denomination. Instead, it has a prominent sign to show its Nazarene connection, and members draw upon their Nazarene heritage as a way of expanding the kingdom of God in Brazil. Many key denominational leaders have come out of that church. The congregation houses the denominational publishing ministry on church property.

The church has also become a main base for launching and strengthening other Nazarene churches in Brazil. They start two new churches a year and regularly support four other churches.

For your church and mine: Has our church learned to reach beyond itself--to our denomination or fellowship and perhaps beyond? What new horizons are we reaching as we seek to strengthen or launch other congregations? Are we more of a "keeper" of people or a church that sends them out into the "beyond"?

Multiplying Leaders: "The role of the pastors is to equip and train members to be effective in ministry," Flavio explained to me. "If the pastor plays the role of equipper and trainer, the church will be more involved in ministry, and as a result, the whole Body of Christ will benefit."

As leaders are developed, they come to embody the church's vision at new levels. They learn how to find the lost (Luke 19:10), disciple the found (Matt. 4:19, Col. 1:28), equip for service (1 Cor. 12:4-7), and transform the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

For your church and mine: What percentage of the congregation are we actively developing as leaders or potential leaders? How intentional are we about empowering others according to their spiritual gifts and then equipping them to use their gifts? To what extent are we truly multiplying leaders?

Culture of a Church

Churches may be healthier in some parts of the world than in others, but no one has figured out how to be immune to gravity. People all over the world tend to settle in, becoming content with where they are spiritually. We easily become satisfied with the status quo, not stretching to new heights of faith because we give in to gravity's pull to sit still.

Churches need the driving force of a godly leader to launch them out into the deep. I was personally challenged by my time with Pastor Valvassoura and his Brazilian congregation, leaving me with a hunger to reach beyond my present level of vision.

Once when Jesus' disciples went fishing, he showed up and told them where to cast their net. They followed his leading. "When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish" (John 21:6, NIV). This result was not what they were accustomed to!

We too need to let down our nets to reach lots of fish. We too need to keep reaching beyond everything we have experienced to date.

Tips . . . for Effective Evangelism in Mainline Churches
by **Bill McConnell**

McConnell is senior pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) [www.harrisonfcc.org] in Harrison, Ohio, and author of *You Can't Scare Me, I Have Kids* (Authorhouse, 2003).

For our denominational website I have been gathering information about programs and ministries that churches find helpful in doing evangelism. The following three ideas have been effective from our congregation's perspective; I used them to "prime the pump" for suggestions from others.

The Alpha Course

The fifteen-session course on the basics of Christianity is designed to reach those outside the church who have some basic questions and some basic misunderstandings about the Christian faith. The course originated in the Church of England and is available on video. During the sessions, attendees watch the video and then divide into small groups to discuss the topic of the night. The small-group leaders are trained to field all questions, even the hostile ones, with grace and love. A part of the course is a "weekend away" where the participants have the opportunity to hear about the Holy Spirit. The Alpha Course has been a powerful evangelism tool in our congregation. We have had over 300 people take the course, seeing many longtime church members "connect the dots" about their faith and catch on fire for God. We have also seen dozens of people accept Christ through the Alpha Course. The Alpha web sites are www.alphacourse.org and www.alphausa.org.

Becoming a Contagious Christian

This short course uses some video vignettes and teaches Joe and Jill Average Christian how to share their faith in a way that is comfortable. It is evangelism done within the context of relationships. The course is based on the best-selling book of the same name by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg. We try to teach this course once a year at our church. We are considering using the curriculum in all thirty of our small groups this year. Material is available at www.willowcreek.com (type *Becoming A Contagious Christian* into the website's "Search" feature).

Servant Evangelism

This evangelism tool is completely nonthreatening, and thus it provides an easy way to recruit even the most reticent church member to do evangelism. It is based on the concept of doing random acts of kindness (RAKs). Our church has handed out 500 balloons at our town's Memorial Day parade, provided umbrella escorts on a rainy day at the local grocery store, washed windshields at a nearby gas station, and handed out free soft drinks and water at a four-way stop. All of this is done free, with no strings attached. When asked, we tell people we just

want to bless them and let them know that God loves them. Servant Evangelism is effective because it is

- quick
- high volume
- done in groups
- culture current
- gives the Holy Spirit an open door to convict those we are leading to Christ
- allows shy people to launch into effective evangelism
- an approach families can do together
- easily picked up by new Christians
- simple
- friendly, non-pushy, non-aggressive
- appeals to every segment of our cities
- emotionally safe
- giving-centered rather than asking-centered
- provides a safe place for ambitious people to expend their energy
- provides an open door for the miraculous—if God so moves
- big fun!

To learn more about Servant Evangelism read *Conspiracy of Kindness* by Steve Sjogren, founding pastor of the 6,000-member Vineyard Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and/or visit www.servantevangelism.com.

Loitering for The Lord
By Alexander M. Jacobs

Jacobs, a Lutheran (ELCA) pastor, has been in campus ministry for thirty years—previously in Michigan and California and most recently at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. He is currently doing interim ministry at a church in Wisconsin.

"Jesus therefore no longer went about openly among the Jews, but went from there to the country near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim; and there he stayed [loitered] with the disciples" (John 11:54, RSV).

I've always been amazed at how far I will go to justify my behavior. I'm even more impressed at how good I've become at it. During my twenty years in missionary work on college and university campuses, I've developed a style that I call my "loitering" ministry. It's especially effective on urban, commuter campuses where traditional chaplaincy models give way to "preaching to a cafeteria line." The missionary stance of modern campus ministry calls us to be where the students are, and generally, that's not in our offices or centers but in the student unions, cafeterias, libraries, and local "hangouts."

When I decided to try to uncover some biblical precedent for my style, I asked a graduate student in philosophy if he knew the Greek work for loiter. A few hours later I found a piece of scrap paper taped to my office door and on it was scribbled *diatribo*. This verb actually appears twice in the Gospel of John. It appears in a variant reading of the above quotation, where the preferred reading is *menein*, John's favorite word to describe Jesus' action of remaining with us. The other example is in John 3:22 where Jesus goes into Judea and "loiters" while he baptizes. *Diatribo* is used more frequently in Acts to describe Paul's missionary style of "hanging out" in various Hellenistic cities. There is, then, at least a modicum of precedent for messianic loitering and much more for apostolic loitering. So I figure that I'm on good theological ground.

The other facet of the John 11 passage that intrigued me was that Jesus whiled away his time in "Ephraim." A quick look through the commentaries and geographies disclosed that there is no certainty about where "Ephraim" is located. John's description, though, is instructive. It's away from Jerusalem and near the "wilderness." In other words, it's away from the religious center of life and close to a place of journeying, risk, or uncertainty.

That sounds a lot like my "loitering ministry." I move away from my "religious center" where I'm in charge, where my authority as a pastor is assumed, and I move out into a place where I'm one among many who are seeking and searching. It's also a place where I'm asking to be followed and volunteering to act as a guide. The contemporary urban university is surely a place where people risk an uncertain journey into an uncertain future. . . . It's like Ephraim.¹

Loitering is the practice of presence. Before venturing onto the campus to loiter, I always ask myself if I can be available to people for as much as two hours. Frequently, I don't stay that long, but there have been times when two hours weren't enough. The next question I ask myself is "Am I ready to listen?" The primary stance of the "apostolic loiterer" is that of listener. Before the Word can be spoken, there must be a genuine willingness to listen to the concerns, hurts,

hopes, and stresses of the other person: student, faculty/staff member, etc. In addition, I must remember to let the other person set the agenda.²

The initial phase of any loitering ministry is to establish a trusting relationship, a warm presence. Certainly on some days I go onto campus with a clear agenda, an itinerary of destinations and people to see. But most of these contacts result from weeks of loitering and being available and present to people.

Loitering is the practice of presence.

A ministry of presence doesn't just happen. It's a planned and integrated priority of the overall ministry. It takes time to discover the best hours to be present, the most popular places to eat and talk, and where the students of color and the international students are likely to be. Like pastoral calling in any congregation, loitering must be scheduled.

One of my favorite images for a university campus comes from a poem by Langston Hughes titled "Pennsylvania Station."³ He compares the hurrying people and the bustle of today's transportation centers to the popularity of the great cathedrals of old. The poem ends with this memorable image:

"The search was ever for a dream of God . . . to glorify the earth -- and you -- and me."

The hurried pace and hectic schedule we've set for ourselves betray our need for "a dream of God." But I believe it's still there, underneath our busyness or pushed to the margins of our calendars. The apostolic loiterer is one who waits for the moment when the student or teacher is ready to ask the question or hear the call or enter the dream. Over the years, I've heard over and over again the stock disclaimers, "Well, you know, I'm really an atheist." Or, "I used to go to church, but I didn't get anything out of it." Or, "I believe in God, but the institutional church turns me off."

All of these responses must be heard and accepted with respect before any evangelical response ought to be made. Frequently, after a month or two or three, or longer, the questions begin to come: "Do you think God really cares about what I do with my life?" "Why does God allow such terrible things to happen in the world?" "I want to know how you can represent the church in all these social justice issues; does the church really care about them?" When the questions flow, the relationship of trust is already in place. Then the Word can be spoken both pastorally and prophetically.

Loitering is the practice of promise.

If the gospel is anything, it's unconditional promise. Through the gospel we're assured that God is faithful in the face of our frailties, that God is loving even when we're not lovable. Moreover, the gospel insists that the style of the gospel-bringer is hopeful conversation. In contrast to our culture of despair and anxiety, the gospel-bringer raises the vision of a hopeful future. In an economy where "durable goods" are defined as those expected to last at least three years, the gospel-bringer expresses a hopefulness that's eternally durable.

Some homework must be done before loitering, especially if you're going to specific offices of student organizations. It's important to be aware of the current issues they're facing and to be sensitive to their needs. The wide variety of persons you meet on campus requires a knack for remembering names and associated issues and concerns, both personal and corporate.

**To be sensitive to others' needs, some homework
must be done before loitering.**

On a single day recently, I ran into a professor whose mother had just died, a student looking for a new daycare facility for her two children, a group of Palestinians depressed at the prospects for peace in their homeland, a student rejected the third time for graduate school, a vice-chancellor tearing his hair out over the number of sexual harassment charges on campus—and more. When I returned to my office, I sent the first person a copy of *Good Grief* by Granger Westberg. The second person got the names of several nearby churches that offer good daycare. I made a note to visit the Palestinian student office the next day. I then sent a note of encouragement to the student seeking grad school and wrote myself a reminder to visit the Women's Center to talk with the director about harassment on campus. In all these meetings the parting word was "I will keep you in my prayers." I'm convinced that something extraordinarily comforting arises from knowing that at least one other person is praying for your needs.

Loitering is pastoral care.

A local colleague of mine recently said, "I'm convinced that I would do more good visiting a local bar and talking with the patrons than preaching to the choir on Sunday morning." There was an air of frustration in this remark --- and a lot of truth. I said to him, "It's really not an either/or choice, but both/and."

I'm convinced that "loitering" ought to be part of every pastoral ministry. Once a parish has been defined, the centers of activity are easily identifiable: malls, bars, gas stations, video arcades, parks, etc. It's important to remember the dictionary definition of parish: "a church district in the care of one pastor; also: the residents of such an area." The implication is that the "residents" are not necessarily identical with the church membership. It's essential to recognize the difference between a "ministry to Lutherans [Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, etc.]," and a "Lutheran ministry." Since Lutheran ministry, among many others, is fundamentally ecumenical, it follows that loitering is fundamentally an ecumenical activity.

When a parish and pastor have determined that loitering will be part of their ministry, goals and expectations will need to be clearly defined: how much time per week will be given to loitering; who are the most needy in the parish; how many new members, if any, do we expect to receive; what kind of budget will we establish; who, when, and how will we evaluate the results of this component of ministry?

In Martin Luther's day, he was looking for a gracious God. Today, people are looking for gracious neighbors. If loitering as a ministry style provides one more gracious person in the mix of the marketplace, then it's worth the risk.

Notes

Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible Series. (Doubleday & Company, Inc.: Garden City, New York), pp. 420 ff.

Douglas John Hall, "Who Tells the World's Story: Theology in Quest for a Partner in Dialogue." *INTERPRETATION*, Vol. XXXVI, January 1982, Number 1, pp. 47 ff.

The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, New York, 1994), p. 59.