

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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Critical Mass

Part XV: Designing an Evangelism Program

by Gary North

Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests (Matt. 22:8-10).

The parable of the king who invites guests to his son's wedding is a familiar one. It illustrates the process of evangelism. The marriage supper of the lamb is the final judgment. The whole world will be brought to this wedding feast, but those who wear no wedding garments will be cast out:

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:11-14).

There are four stages in this selection process. First, the initial invitations went to people who all refused to attend the wedding, or thought they could refuse.

And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city (Matt. 22:3-7).

This referred to Old Covenant Israel. The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 fulfilled this prophecy of imminent judgment in history.

Second, the servants go into all the highways, so as to send the invitations to everyone. This refers to the gentile world. The highways constitute the entire world. Third, the wedding feast begins. Everyone must attend. This is the day of final judgment. Fourth, those without the proper garments

are cast out. This is the lake of fire.

What do we learn from this parable? That few of those who are approached by the messengers will respond in faith to the message of salvation solely by God's grace through men's faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ at Calvary. Over the entire history of the church, most people will not respond in faith. This does not mean that in every era or in every region there will be minimal response. It means only that over the entire history of man from A.D. 70 until the final judgment, many are called but few are chosen.

Your Church's Assigned Highway

If I were to ask you the following question, what would you answer? "Which people need to attend church?" The answer: "Everyone."

This leads to my second question: "To whom should your church bring the message of salvation?" If you again answer "everyone," you have missed an important point of the parable. The parable informs us that there are many servants and many highways. No servant can successfully monitor every highway. No denomination can successfully bring the gospel to every possible traveller. Neither can any congregation. The parable teaches that all of the king's servants are supposed to monitor all of the highways. This implies that certain servants are assigned a particular highway.

No congregation can successfully bring the gospel to every person in the community. Each congregation offers certain advantages for certain kinds of people. No congregation offers significant benefits to every sort of person. This is the message of the division of labor (1 Cor. 12). Until some denomination in Bosnia can bring Serbs and Croats into the same local congregation and build a successful ministry to Muslims, I shall continue to preach the need for the division of evangelical labor.

Needs

Sit down with a stack of white 3 by 5 note cards and a stack of colored cards. On the blank side of each white card write down a single need that membership in your congregation meets. On the lined side, write down how your congregation meets this need. Fill out as many white cards as you can. If possible, invite others in your congregation to do the same thing. The idea is to get the largest stack of white cards that you can.

It is very difficult to persuade anyone to believe that your organization can meet his or her needs. **Physical needs** are met first by paychecks. Wal-Mart meets most of these needs cheaply. State welfare agencies meet the others. When it comes to **spiritual needs**, almost nobody regards them as

personal needs, since people assume: (1) God meets all these needs free of charge for all people; or (2) these needs have been taken care of by the individual's existing supplier; or (3) they are not really needs. Reason two is why the first group of people identified by Jesus' parable paid no attention to the king's servants. Reasons one and three are why hardly anyone takes seriously the free offer of the gospel.

If your church's evangelism programs have failed to attract visitors, let alone new members, when appealing to spiritual people's needs, the church must do what successful advertisers do if it expects to grow – to reach critical mass. It must appeal to people's wants.

Wants

What are wants? Wants are goals that people are willing to pay for when they believe that someone else can help them achieve them. They are medium-term and long-term goals which, unlike physical needs, people are willing to buy on a deferred delivery installment plan. Here is a short list of wants that are **universal**: peace of mind, more friends, a better job, more money at the end of the month, greater control over your life, business connections, social connections, and above all, a sense of purpose or meaning in life. (In Texas, people also want free access to a gymnasium, a racquet ball court, a basketball court, and a whirlpool unit. This is called a "family life center." Large Baptist churches build them.) **Married couples** want fewer arguments, obedient children, moral children, better relations with in-laws and children, a good day care program, better education for older children, and a youth group larger than five attendees for each child. **Single people** want to get married.

Next, grab a colored note card. On the blank side, write down a want that your congregation **uniquely** meets in the community. On the lined side of the card, write down exactly how your congregation fulfills this want. Fill out as many cards as you can. Ideally, each benefit should be so unique that you personally are unable to obtain it by switching church membership.

Now get a box for the cards. Get some dividers. On each divider, write down a specific age group or other identifiable group in your community whose needs and wants can be met by these advantages. If one advantage fits several groups, fill out a separate 3 by 5 card for each group: white cards for needs, colored cards for wants.

This exercise will take each participant several hours. If adult Sunday school classes do it, it will take several weeks. It is well worth the effort. What you want at the end of this exercise is to find which groups in the community have a large number of cards. These are the groups to target for evangelism.

If you discover that the colored cards are few in number, you will learn why your congregation is having trouble growing. If you also discover that even these few cards have few corresponding places in between the dividers, you will learn why your congregation is shrinking.

A Question of Proof

Christians who engage in evangelism should understand well in advance that the average person on any highway is busy, distracted, and unconcerned with attending the marriage supper of the lamb. He believes he has no unmet

spiritual needs. He has little desire to spend time with you in a discussion of how to meet his spiritual needs. Even if you can persuade him about the coming marriage supper, he thinks he is already dressed in a clean marriage garment – at the very least, a name-brand wash-and-wear cloak.

In contrast, he does have time to speak to you about fulfilling his wants. But like all of us, he tends not to believe anyone who offers a program to fulfill his wants. The most difficult task of any advertiser is to be believed. The man on the highway is besieged with offers. Every seller promises to fulfill his wants at a price. He has been burned before; he knows he will be burned again. He wants to minimize his next burn. So he says, "Prove it."

This is the great barrier facing the evangelist today. Very few congregations have systematically structured their evangelism programs to offer proof that they can and do fulfill people's wants. Instead, these programs concentrate on the wants of the existing members, who presumably have had many of their spiritual needs met already. Churches rarely structure their programs to meet both pre-need wants and post-need wants. They should be recruiting and training those whose spiritual needs have been definitively met to fulfill the wants of travellers with the unmet needs. Very few congregations do this.

Successful Evangelism Is a Two-Stage Process

Successful evangelism is normally a two-stage process: meeting people's wants first and then their spiritual needs. Congregations should initially attract highway travellers by means of an appeal to their wants. Only later do visitors learn that the God preached by the church can in fact meet their spiritual needs. So it was in ancient Israel: the benefits were perceived first (Deut. 4:5-8). So it is today. If the major benefits are not immediately visible to the visiting traveller, the church's lure of fulfilled wants will not ring true.

How can a church prove that it can fulfill a traveller's wants? By targeting primarily those travellers whose wants are met by the congregation's package of benefits. Because no congregation can fulfill every person's wants, each must specialize in fulfilling specific wants of a just a few targeted groups. Until a congregation has identified those groups whose wants it can uniquely or at least sufficiently fulfill, its evangelism program is unlikely to prosper.

The first step in developing a successful evangelism program is to identify the congregation's appropriate highway. The second step is to make sure that the offer can be met by the product, i.e., that the promise of being able to fulfill several important wants can be met by the programs that the congregation offers – preferably, programs unique to the congregation.

Conclusion

Does your congregation offer very few unique solutions to highway travellers' wants? If so, it is time to begin pressuring others in the congregation to begin to develop programs that do meet a few key wants. It is time to identify the targeted travellers on a particular highway whose wants your congregation's members can conceivably meet. If your congregation is unsuccessful in this effort, its future is under a dark cloud. Attrition will produce the final implosion. Critical mass will work against you.

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