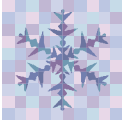


Lighthouse Keeper



EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

December 2006

Never Give Up by Les Cool

How long should we pray for the same person to find Jesus? The question is valid. The question is uncomfortable because we are all tempted to give up. We want God to do God-things according to our schedule. Such is not always best. Nor should it be expected. My answer to the question is “one more time.” Pray for your special person one more time. And then one more time.

I’ve prayed for my parents’ salvation for over 25 years. Quitting was not an option. Frustrated with God was the norm. We’ve had “the chat” numerous times. The gospel had been clearly explained. The invite had been offered. Silence. A glimmer. More silence. Certainty. A little bit less certainty. Why won’t they just say, “We believe!” so I can rest?

Mom was the first of my parents I was sure was “in” the Kingdom. It was amazing. One Sunday, in my church, she was suddenly a believer. The message had struck home. But Dad. Now there was a problem. Dialog? All the time. Verbal commitment? Not on your life. It was a kind of game he played with me. And then a month ago, in my church, he stood and came forward for Communion as a believer. He stood and came forward. I could have fallen over.

One more time, I’m glad I had continued to pray.

Just two weeks later, my “in-the-Kingdom” father traded time for eternity after suffering a fatal heart attack. No suffering. Just one last breath here and the next with Jesus. I miss Dad. And I will for a very long time. But I know that I will see him again.

How long should we pray for the same person to find Jesus? One more time.

Are you ready to give up? Ready to move on to someone more likely to believe? Don’t! You may be that person’s only Bible. You may be God’s appointed witness. Remember: Salvation is in the Lord’s hands. And He does all things well. Never give up.



More Thought on Fishing

For the last couple of issues, we've been discovering various ways some of our E.C. churches have taken to fishing...fishing for men, women and children. Some of these "home-grown" ideas are unique to the church's location and circumstances. Other ideas are easy to adapt to any setting. Following are a few more ideas to consider for your church.

Vacation Bible School:

Vacation Bible School is, or can be, an amazing outreach tool for the local church. Sponsored by many churches each summer, VBS is actually looked forward to by church neighbors. The unchurched may think of VBS as free time without their kids, a fun night of watching their little ones takes part in a church production. With minimal planning, the local church can turn these contacts into exposure to the gospel, church involvement, and salvation experiences.

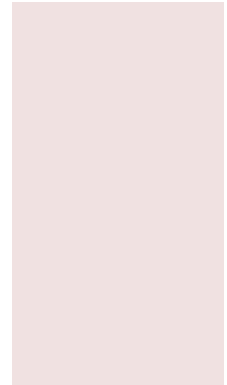
According to Rev. Robert Stahl, VBS has been Lancaster (PA) Faith Church's biggest outreach event of the once-per-year variety. Recently, they advertised and conducted a class for the unchurched adults who normally drop off their children at VBS. The topics included budgeting in a charge-as-you-go world, divorce proofing your marriage, etc. The first attempted ended with mixed results. But it is something to try again with some small changes. Rev. Stahl speaks highly of VBS. "Over the years, we've been able to reach several families through VBS."

St. Matthew's E.C. Church in Emmaus, PA enjoys their annual Vacation Bible School. In addition to the "normal" outreach pieces to the event, the family at Emmaus canvasses the community with door hangers announcing the time and place. The experts say that repeat contact helps develop a sense of trust. And trust opens the door for dialog, even dialog about Jesus.

Welcome Packets:

Never minimize the value of the welcome packet. Sure, they are for visitors who are already in the door. But you cannot predict the hands that may touch the packet once it leaves the building. Many of our sister churches use welcome packets. Some are folders. Others are mugs, water bottles, bags of goodies. But they all carry info about Jesus, About His local church.

Suggestions: Be brief? Most visitors do not want to read a book. Be clever! Make sure what you offer is attractive, eye catching. If not, you've only added to the area landfill. Be accurate! It's amazing how much misinformation is passed along in documents that have not been thoroughly proofread. Be professional. I know the church isn't a business. But we are to put our best foot forward. No misspellings. Use correct grammar.



And a Few Other Ideas:

The list of outreach ideas continues to grow as I speak with more and more pastors. The following list is basically news without comment. Check them out and see which might be applied to your context:

Church concerts designed with the unchurched in mind. Bring in a band or group that has a sound that you KNOW is attractive to people in your community. Offer free admission. Offer food. Remember, you're investing in people.

Contemporary services. Try a worship experience with a format UNLIKE your normal service. Offer it at an unusual time. Offer it at a time that will target a certain group of people. I've often wondered if an early Friday evening service would catch people in our area before they leave for the beach.

Anything that serves children and yet requires parents to step inside the building. And make sure that EVERYTHING THEY SEE makes them feel good about leaving their children with you. If the kids are happy, Mommy will be happy. She may even come for herself.

Make sure you allow your pastor to be out and about in the community. Some of my best contacts have been over a meal, or while waiting at the print shop, or at the grocery store. Some pastors make contacts at their kids' ball games, or while serving as chaplains or volunteers in the community. Encourage your pastor to get out of the office. Pay for his lunch!

Fishing! There are as many ways to fish as there are fish in the waters. The trick is to actually go fishing. Otherwise, the fish just swim on by. Reaching people for Jesus is equally open to a wide variety of techniques. The best techniques are those that work for you. DO NOT feel as if you have to follow someone's example or model, even the example of seemingly professional and successful. Be yourself. Happy fishing!



“THE TRICK IS TO ACTUALLY GO FISHING. OTHERWISE, THE FISH JUST SWIM ON BY.”

Wanted:

Questions! What questions do you have about church outreach? What questions do you have about evangelism, personal or corporate? If you have a question, others may also be interested in the answer. Please send your questions to Pastor Cool (for the next issue of the Lighthouse Keeper) at coolcopy43@comcast.net. Let's keep the flame burning brightly as we share our experiences!

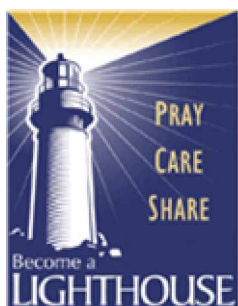




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Lighthouse Resources

Mission America Coalition (www.missionamerica.org; click “Lighthouse Movement”) is committed to “Uniting Christians for Evangelism and Revival.” The Mission America Coalition (MAC) is helping mobilize Christian leaders and individual Christians to collaborate together to reach America with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Their mission statement is “The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole Nation—and to the World.” Through encouraging Christians to pray for, care for and share Jesus Christ with every person, the Coalition emphasizes spiritual unity, evangelism and revival. Check out its helpful website.



The Editor Needs to Hear from You:

Personal Evangelism... What is your favorite gospel presentation? The Four Spiritual Laws? The Bridge Illustration? Will you share with us? Please send your resources to Rev. Leslie Cool, the Lighthouse Keeper editor (coolcopy43@comcast.net).

Pastors, I Would Love to Hear from You... What exciting programs and events has your church hosted? What worked? What didn't? Your testimony could be the impetus for the church in the next town. Send your story to Rev. Leslie Cool, the Lighthouse Keeper editor (coolcopy43@comcast.net).