

# Lighthouse Keeper

Evangelical Congregational Church

May 2008



## Persistent Outreach

### - An interview with Robert Stahl and Joel Kime -

By Les Cool

There seems to be genuine confusion regarding what makes for a successful outreach program for a local congregation. Some cling to the way it has always been done: pastoral visits and revival services. Others want to break the mold, running to every extreme novelty presented to the church. Perhaps it is not so much what we do, as it is that we do something.

You're invited to take a closer look at one of our own churches, Faith E.C. Church in Lancaster, PA. At Faith Church, we find a family committed to growth. The big lesson we learn is that actually doing outreach is what is most important.

**Lighthouse Keeper:** The news is out. I hear you've been busy with outreach ideas and events. Would you care to share some of these ideas for others to consider for their churches? What ideas have you been working with? What has worked for your church?

**Bob:** I have a rather lengthy list of ideas we have tried. Some are now annual events, others were once-and-never-again events. Where would you like me to start?

**LK:** Talk about the ideas and events that have yet to produce fruit. What did you do? What were the results? What did you learn from these efforts?

**Bob:** Outreach events always produce fruit in the lives of those who participate in them. We have conducted several events which have touched our community but have not yet brought new people into our church.



**Community Car Wash:** One of our families owns a car wash business which is located less than a mile from our church. They gave us two hours of free car washes to share with the

community. In addition to the car wash, we gave away some light refreshments (hot dogs, chips, punch). We had a team of people there who individually visited briefly with those who came in for a wash and shared with them printed information about our church. This created a lot of good will for our church in the community. But it did not bear fruit in terms of the un-churched that came in for a wash choosing to attend our church on a regular basis. One family came just one or two Sundays.

**Community Prayer Walk:** We've had enough people involved in this ministry to walk through the neighborhood right around the church and to visit a



**Prayer Walk**

development about a mile away from the church building. This again developed good will as we were able to interact personally

with some people and pray for specific needs in their lives. But it has yet to bear fruit in terms of people attending our services.

**Doughnuts at School:** One of the members of our Evangelism Committee is a teacher in our local high school. He supplied doughnuts for the staff lunchroom at the school as an indication of our appreciation for the school staff. This again has created good will between our church and the school but no visible fruit as of yet.

**Contemporary Outdoor Concert:** Our praise band put on an outdoor concert at the church using a flatbed truck for the stage. Free food was served. It was a wonderful evening, and people from the community and "passersby" were in attendance. This again is an event which I believe has

generated good will in the community but no fruit as of yet.

**Lighthouse Ministry (prayer, care, share):**

We have often stressed the principals of being a lighthouse, having preached and taught on this concept for our daily lives. Our continued prayer is that more of our people will catch the vision for this ministry.

**Friend Day:** We tried this outreach on two occasions. It did not work for us.

**LK:** No obvious or immediate fruit. That's not unusual for outreach events. Many of the experts tell us that six or seven contacts are necessary before trust, and response, should be expected. You must be approaching the saturation point, becoming a household name in your community. That is a positive.

It also sounds like you are not blind to the reality that fruit is not always visible. You faithfully share, and trust God to do His thing.

**LK:** How has "doing outreach" benefited your church family? Has the mere effort of working together been a good thing for Faith?

**Bob:** Our outreach events have given opportunity for those who participated in them to stretch themselves spiritually. I believe these events will grow the Kingdom in ways beyond the event itself. Participating in outreach events gives our people the confidence to share Christ in ways which are not confined to a single outreach experience.

**LK:** So, "less successful" does not mean waste of time?

**Bob:** Certainly not.

**LK:** Talk to us about your successes.

**Bob:** Most of our successful outreach ministries are ongoing. They have become part of who we are. These programs include:



**VBS:** Vacation Bible School is a huge event here at Faith Church and has been our most successful event in terms of bringing new families into the church.

**MOPS:** Our Mothers of Preschoolers program has been in existence for several years. The majority of the moms who attend are not affiliated with our church.

This ministry has produced fruit: one of the

moms who began attending MOPS also brought her children to Pioneer Club, and then began attending worship. Now her husband and children also attend worship, along with her parents.



**Children & Youth Ministries:** Both Pioneer Club (children's ministry) and X-Factor (youth ministry) have in attendance those who do not attend our Sunday school program or worship services. One of our Pioneer Club families has now begun attending our worship services. We believe that excellent youth and children's ministries are a vital part of attracting new families to a church.

**LK:** Programs like these can become the "meat and potatoes" ministries of a local congregation. I think it's great that you see them as doors into the church. Besides attracting new people, how have these ministries strengthened Faith?

**Bob:** It is always encouraging for the congregation to see new people coming to the church. It is especially encouraging when these new people begin to become involved in the life of the congregation.

**LK:** Are there other tools you have used for outreach that are not necessarily programs?

**Bob:** Yes! Getting the word out "that we are here" has been a priority for a while.



**Information**

**Distribution:** Our young people often distribute throughout the community information about upcoming special events at the church.

These events include VBS and our Christmas Musicale. This has had some success in that we have had those who have brought their children to VBS and ultimately have become a part of our congregation. We also have brochures about our church in the tourist information racks in the hotels and restaurants near the church.

**Church Website:** Our church website, [www.findfaithhere.org](http://www.findfaithhere.org) has been up and running for some time. One family began attending, and has continued to attend,

having found us first on line. A second family came for the first time this past Sunday after they “researched” us first on line before they came.

**LK:** As you think about the many outreaches you have run, what has been the most successful in terms of positive contacts for Christ and for the church?

**Bob:** Vacation Bible School and our website.

**LK:** You have outreaches that have become a regular element of church life. How do you keep these ideas or programs from becoming stale?

**Bob:** The nature of Vacation Bible School, a once a year program, has kept it from becoming stale. Keeping the website updated prevents it from becoming “old”. Many of our other outreaches are so new that they have not had the opportunity to become stale. This however will be something that the church will have to guard against.

**LK:** Bob, do you see any correlation between church members wanting to become involved and your active support and involvement as the pastor?

**Bob:** Certainly! A pastor cannot expect his people to be involved in outreach if he is not actively involved. This does not mean the pastor has to participate in every outreach event or ministry the church has. However the congregation must see the pastor participating at some level.

**LK:** Joel, are there outreach ideas you would care to highlight that start with the youth programs of the church?

**Joel:** Our youth outreach is designed on a model that I learned about from Jeff Berger (Mohn’s Hill EC Church). “CPR” stands for Connect, Present and Receive. One of our youth ministry’s core purposes is “Extend,” helping our students extend God to their peers.

We seek to assist our students in what is for many, a very daunting task, sharing the good news about Jesus with their friends. CPR is designed to help them share. CPR runs on a three month cycle. We run three complete cycles each school year. Monthly Extend events are designed to do two

things: (1) provide tons of fun and (2) emphasize one segment of the CPR cycle.

The Extend event needs to be fun and attractive to the friends our students invite. We want events their friends will enjoy, and want to return next month. It takes several events to progress through the CPR cycle.

**LK:** Please explain this CPR cycle.

**Joel:** The first month, we hold a “C” event. We want our students to Connect with one of their friends who is not a Christian. All they need to do is invite them to the Extend event. This allows the student to

Connect with his/her friend, and that friend gets to Connect with us. At this C event, we simply emphasize the Connection. We have a lot of fun, and purposefully do not have a Gospel presentation.

The Present event is held in the second month. We again ask our students to connect with the same friend, inviting them to our next Extend event. This event will include a Gospel presentation. Of course, we will still provide for loads of fun, but somewhere during the event we have a creative presentation of the Gospel. The key with the Present event is that we do not offer an

invitation to receive the Gospel. We simply Present the Gospel to them. And allow them time to let it impact their hearts and minds.

By this time, they have been with us twice, probably getting a feel for us and hopefully starting to develop some trust. The final Extend event of the cycle is the Receive event. Again, we encourage our students to Connect with the same friends and invite them to a fun event. At this last event in the cycle, we again have a Gospel presentation. But this time, we provide an opportunity to Receive Christ.

**LK:** That is quite an outreach program. What does this process look like?

**Joel:** This past fall, we held a picnic, complete with sports and tons of food. That was our Connect event. We held an Amazing Race that was our Present event. And our Lock-in was our Receive event.

**LK:** How do you feel about the fruit of this ministry?



**Joel:** *I believe God has blessed this ministry in our context. Particularly, we see that our students are being helped to reach out to their friends. This can be so hard to do in high school because of the many pressures our students face.*

**LK:** Is there anything you would care to share that hasn't been invited by one of our insightful questions?

**Joel:** *Mission trips! I believe that mission trips are an excellent way to help students learn the Gospel and practice sharing the Gospel. We have spent a week with Joe Toy in Philadelphia where he trains our students to share the Gospel using various creative means: rope tricks, paint board, a magic Bible coloring book trick, etc. While I don't expect our students to pull out a rope trick and launch it on their friends in the school cafeteria, I am thrilled for the opportunity they've had to learn the Gospel.*

*After a week in Philadelphia, they have all had opportunities to actually share the Gospel over and over again. That means it is getting into their minds. They can articulate it. This might not sound like much, but that alone is a massive achievement that I would guess quite a few of our adults cannot do.*

*During the week in Philadelphia we also ask them to write a letter home to at least one non-Christian friend, telling them why they are in Philadelphia and explaining what the Gospel is all about. This project forces them to make a connection between Philadelphia and Lancaster. Furthermore, they will have to face that friend when they get home. Their friend's possible questions could lead to witness for Jesus ("What the heck was that letter?").*

**LK:** Joel, perhaps you should run a few adult adventures to the big city with Joe Toy. Your youth group could be the sponsoring agency for your church's adult population. Maybe you could turn it into a fund-raiser.

**Joel:** *I should have also mentioned that last year our adults took their first trip to Philadelphia. They spent a long weekend with Joe in the spring, doing very much the same things our youth have done. Some of them reported that this was the first time they ever handed out a tract. One lady said she was terrified to share the Gospel with students on the campus of Temple University, but once she got started, her grandmotherly instincts took over. She had a wonderful time talking with students, even giving them hugs when they said goodbye. Another*

*adult was so motivated by the trip that he ended up going back to Philadelphia a few months later with the youth group. The adults are now enlisting team members for their second trip, which will take place this coming April.*

**LK:** Thank you for your time, for sharing your experiences and the lessons you have learned. I'm sure our readers will find it easy to learn from your successes, as well as from the not-so-immediately-successful attempts to reach out to your community.

**LK:** It makes sense at this point, to mention a few laws of outreach (maybe, observations) that help us keep wanting to try, even when we seem to be making little or no progress.

#### **Law #1**

NO outreach idea or program is universally successful. Just because it worked for "church A," or for "churches A through Q," does not mean it will work for your church. But most ideas are at least worth considering.

#### **Law #2**

NO outreach idea or program should be written off as "not for us" until you've tried it, or at least thought it through. As they say, "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

#### **Law #3**

EVERY outreach attempt will produce fruit. Some fruit will be immediate and visible. Other fruit will be less obvious: seeds planted for the Kingdom, good will in the community, church growth through working together, etc.

#### **Law #4**

CHURCH GROWTH seldom just happens. Church growth is almost always the direct result of some form of outreach, whether an official program or word-of-mouth advertising by excited church family members.

Persistent outreach has made the difference for Faith Church. Are you persistent with outreach with your church family? Variety has been vital for Faith Church. Have you tried a variety of outreach methods? If the "same old, same old" continues to not produce fruit, you might want to consider trying another outreach technique. Give Bob or Joel a call. We're sure they would bend your ear sharing their story.



# Prayer – Care – Share: Touching Lives

*by Les Cool*

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Evangelism doesn't have to be difficult! That's why the E. C. Church is a strong promoter of the Lighthouse Movement. No gimmicks! No fancy program! Just lifestyle evangelism, the sharing of Jesus with people who are already in our daily lives. The Lighthouse Movement style of evangelism is known for its simplicity and its nonthreatening format. Three steps are offered to help you share the gospel message: prayer, care and share.

"Prayer" is simply talking to God about our neighbors. As Christians, we already pray. As a part of personal evangelism, we are directed to pray, to talk to God about our neighbors. That's easy to do. And that's something all of us can do. But don't stop with prayer.

"Care" is looking for and responding to opportunities to serve the needs of our neighbors. The longer we pray for our neighbors, talk to God about our neighbors, the more likely we are to begin to see them the way God sees them. And that is but a short step from recognizing how we can serve them.

"Share" is making ourselves available to speak for Jesus. The genius of lifestyle evangelism is that the pressure is on God. We live beside the people we are praying about. And God does the hard work, setting up appointments to share Jesus. All we need to do is open our mouths when invited to do so.

Is your home a lighthouse for Jesus?

## Lighthouse Resources:

**Mission America Coalition** (<http://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 Lighthouse editor invites your thoughts and experiences in response to the following question: **How do you prepare your members to receive visitors?** I would be delighted to print your ideas. Perhaps we could do an interview. Drop me a note ([coolcopy43@comcast.net](mailto:coolcopy43@comcast.net)) or give me a call (302-395-1286). Let's find a way to share and encourage others by what you have accomplished.