

Lighthouse Keeper



EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

October 2007

A Few Rambling Thoughts

By Les Cool

Here we are again, another deadline looming on the edge of my calendar, the ever-troublesome blank screen before me. What shall we do? This editor needs to hear from you. What have you been doing to reach out for Jesus? How have you been making the Cross an issue worthy of discussion with your neighbors? New programs? Clever outreaches? We need to chat.

In the mean time, a few rambling thoughts:

In light of the BIG picture — and not too many years ago — evangelism, outreach and church growth were treated as if success was as simple as putting up a building, hanging an appropriately large sign, running an ad in the local paper, and waiting for people to show up. Now of course, this was long after Jacob Albright worked himself to an early death riding the countryside in search of lost souls. Today, with our rapidly changing technology, we can reach the world with a few keystrokes and the click of a mouse. But is anyone listening?

Techno-savvy churches and church plants have been making use of every techno-tool offered for reaching people outside of the church. Phon-a-thons work in some areas of the country. But NOT in an area known for telemarketers. Newspapers and local info broadsheets can be helpful, but readership is down in every venue. Some churches even sponsor their local traffic and weather announcements in exchange for a scrolling test regarding Jesus, their church, and various ministries. Webpages and links to a wide variety of church shopping networks (www.findachurch.com; www.churchangel.com; www.forministry.com; etc.) bring hits from Christians, and others, looking for a new place to worship. But many sources of the statistics we worship confirm that the largest percentage of “real” church growth (new converts) is not the result of techno-outreach.

So, how does a church do outreach that yields new convert growth?

Community. Person-to-person contact is the missing link in most outreach endeavors. In our fast-paced, drive-from-my-garage-to-my-parking-garage-and-home-again world,



we have become detached from other living and breathing humans. And we have become lonely. Don't believe me? Do a web search for dating services. We're so busy, and yet so lonely, we're eager to have someone else do the footwork in finding our next date, perhaps even a mate. People do now know enough people.

Effective outreach can almost seem anachronistic in our high-tech culture. Even though high-tech is a selling feature for a church, it is something much older that keeps the visitor. Though we must embrace the technology behind which our target audience hides, the solution for effective outreach is much simpler.

The missing piece in most outreach efforts is relationship. Let's think about this. Jesus, the apostle Paul, Jacob Albright, maybe the pastor or friend who brought Jesus into your life depended upon relationship-building skills to attract people to God and to the church. In light of this ideal, the question becomes: Can we do effective relational outreach in a technologically wired world? I believe we can.



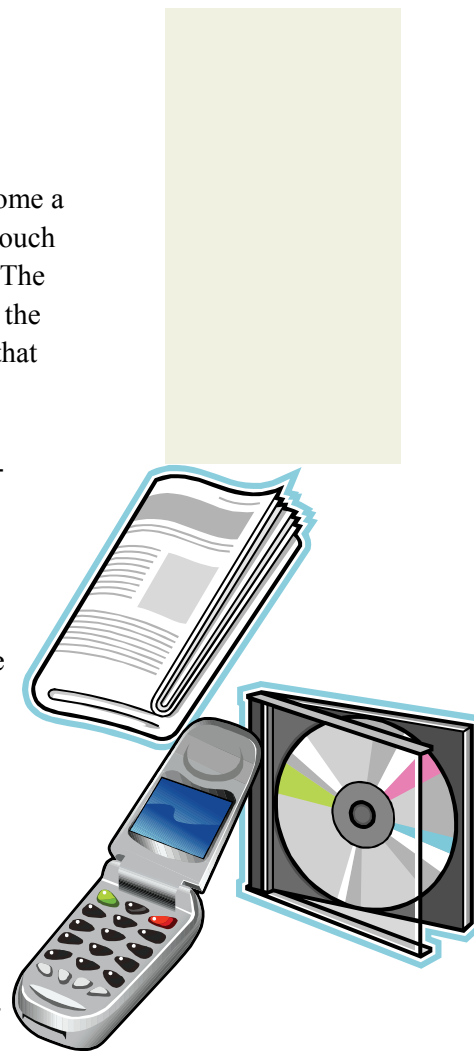
Applying community to outreach:

The experts tell us that four to six impersonal contacts are necessary before we become a household name. And then, and only then, do we begin to establish trust. Personal touch reduces the number of necessary contacts and hastens the process of trust building. The church that moves away from technology to old-fashioned personal touch, shortens the process by which relationships are established. And relationships are solid bridges that bring new people into the local church.

Church members need to knock on doors, introducing themselves and their church to the people who live in your target area. If you long to reach your immediate neighbors with a personal touch, hook yourselves up with a snazzy brochure, nice gifts that remind contacts that you exist (pens, post-it notes, refrigerator magnets, etc.), and even a church info CD. (Be sure to leave your suit coats and ties at home!)

This kind of outreach can be effective because it involves people. The more people who become involved the better. And if you point your people in the direction of family, friends, co-workers and neighbors, the repeat contacts have already been made. Trust may already exist.

The next step? Invitation. Praying for people seems easy enough. It's like gossip. But healthy. We talk with God about other people. Caring can also seem manageable. It's like being nice to other people. You know, being a good neighbor. We get hung up on sharing. It could be our theology. It could be our fears of inadequacy. But sharing is simply invitation. Invitation opens the door to successful outreach. Again, the experts are encouraging. They tell us that one out of our four people will say "Yes" if invited by a friend to visit a church.



Or a less in-your-face application of community:

Reality is a hard task master. Not every church is ready to hit the streets, to knock on doors, to actually see the whites of the eyes of the targeted neighbor. What is one to do? Ads! Less personal, but not ineffective. Ads may be the answer to your church's need to become more visible in your community.

If you've decided to use ads, make sure they are professional grade, target-specific, and memorable. When it comes to word count, less is more. When it comes to pictures, only the best are worth the effort. The first glance must catch the eye. The first read must impress. You only get one chance to connect, and then your ad becomes land-fill material. And when it comes right down to the process, it is almost always more cost-efficient to hire the work out to a professional agency that prints, posts and/or delivers the product. Of course, all of this brings us back to the personal touch element that has been missing from most outreach endeavors.

What do we advertise? Our really hip, oh so cool pastor? The worship band? Safe nurseries? Education that makes a difference? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. And the fellowship. Always advertise the fellowship. People need the Lord, but they probably think they just need other people. Give them what they want. People. People who know Jesus are eager to share Jesus.

These people look like greeters and small group leaders, snack counter attendants and nursery staff. And these people look like the guy in the next chair (who had better be trained to say "hello, how are you?" and actually looks like he means it). Outreach must begin at home. Be prepared to receive the visitors you've invited. I'm sure this thought will be addressed in a future issue of this publication: How do we prepare our members to receive visitors?

The bottom line:

As we wrap up these rambling thoughts, thoughts that have helped keep me sane (or otherwise) over the past several years of church planting and church growth, please be encouraged by the simplicity of effective outreach. Community.

I know we are surrounded by clever churches and pastors who have successfully used techno-tools for outreach. I applaud their efforts and their successes. But DO NOT let them get to you. Do not allow yourselves to be discouraged because you cannot afford, or do not have the people or skills, to pull off such an endeavor.

I assure you their success is not simply technology. Try this: Pull one of these successful pastors aside, look him straight in the eye, and ask, "How did you do it?" You will get a certain amount of "blah-blah-blah-zippidy-do-blah-blah-blah." And then they will always say something about the depth of community they offer to new people. Bingo! (Can we say Bingo?) That's your answer. Their success was rooted in old-fashioned community — relationships.

Need I say more? Go! Hang out with someone outside your church. Talk with God about him/her. Build a relationship with him/her. Share your story. Share Jesus. Be part of the new, old wave, as we invite men and women, boys and girls, to Jesus.



**THE MISSING
PIECE IN MOST
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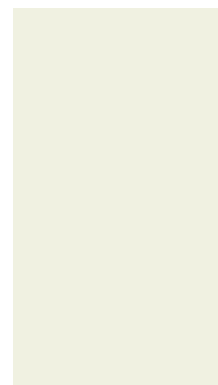
Cool Outreach Resources:

Church Ad Project . . . give voice to the heart of the local church through relevant and attractive ad designs that can be used in a variety of ways (postcards, flyers, posters, etc.). Church Ad is available by phone (1-800-331-9391) and on the web (www.churchad.com). More than 100 fee-for-use ad designs are available.

ChurchMax . . . is all about church marketing and promotion. Resources include direct mail ideas, materials and processing; internet and website tools (including registering a domain name); promotional “things” (from arm bands to zipper pulls) with your name and logo; and the personalized technical support you might need as you reach out for Jesus. Contact ChurchMax by phone (1-866-281-8830) or find them on the web (www.churchmax.com).

Outreach . . . is a provider of church communication and outreach tools, serving local congregations with ideas and materials designed to reach people for Christ. Outreach is available by phone (1-800-991-6011) and on the web (www.outreach.com). Many of their resources are designed with specific target audiences in mind (traditional, contemporary, postmodern, etc.).

Church Marketing Sucks . . . can be a vital asset for your outreach committee. Check out CMS (www.churchmarketingsucks.com) for more creative outreach ideas and insights, as well as links to MANY other resources and experts. This website is not for the faint-of-heart. It can seem overwhelming. But it might be your link to a perfect solution for your current outreach dilemma. In case you’re wondering, this is a real site. Church Marketing Sucks has a mission . . . “to frustrate, educate and motivate the church to communicate, with uncompromising clarity, the truth of Jesus Christ.” Church Marketing Sucks is a part of the Center for Church Communication (www.cfclabs.org), a non-profit organization dedicated to helping the church matter.



Promotional (logo-imprinted gimmicks) Resources:

Gopromos . . . 1-800-523-9909 or www.Gopromos.com

4imprint . . . 1-877-446-7746 or www.4imprint.com

Promo Direct . . . 1-800-748-3326 or www.promodirect.com

Crestline . . . 1-800-221-7797 or www.crestline.com

Amsterdam . . . 1-800-833-6231 or www.AmsterdamPrinting.com



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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.



From the

Editor

Wanted:

In a previous issue, a sermon series touched upon several vital issues/questions that a local church might need to grapple with as they seek to do effective evangelism. The Lighthouse editor is looking for papers, discussions or interviews in response to the following:

- 1) The Question of Identity . . . Who am I?
- 2) The Question of Purpose . . . Why am I here?
- 3) The Question of Reality . . . What am I experiencing?
- 4) The Question of Destiny/Eternity . . . Where am I going?
- 5) The Question of Preparation . . . How do I get there?

Drop me a note (coolcopy43@comcast.net) or give me a call (302-395-1286). Your ideas might be the fuel for the next successful outreach campaign in one of our churches.