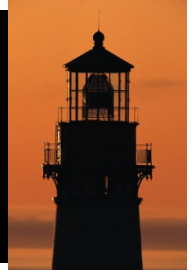


Lighthouse Keeper

Evangelical Congregational Church

September 2008



PEOPLE-FOCUSED OUTREACH

An interview with Barry Rebert, Jeff Berger and Tim Hart –

By Les Cool

Many churches approach outreach with the assumption that good programming is all that is needed to reach their community for Christ. “If we run this program, people will come.” The danger with this approach is becoming program or event focused, and perhaps, missing the people. The ministry staff at Mohn’s Memorial E.C. Church (Mohn’s Hill, PA) prefers outreach that is people-focused. Listen in as we discover what that looks like.

Lighthouse Keeper: Church growth IS happening at Mohn’s Hill. Few people would deny that. It makes sense to think that you have tried, and found helpful, various 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?

Barry E. Rebert: Our church (during times of growth or plateau) has responded well to expository preaching. We also encourage people to share their faith.

Jeffrey S. Berger: Actually, we held steady over the past three years or so. Our greatest intentional outreach is with our youth ministry. We have a middle school (MS) and high school (HS) outreach event almost every month (Fabulous Friday Fun or FFF), and our MS and HS Student Ministry Teams share testimonies and the Gospel at each outreach event so that youth are hearing from other youth. Our youth also attend the Planet Wisdom Conference with Mark Matlock every year. The Gospel is clearly communicated there as well. Our biggest outreaches for children are our VBS and Children’s Retreat.



Timothy S. Hart: When we plan outreach events with our youth, we start by asking our Student Ministry Team what they think their friends would come to. Instead of me trying to decide what would work best, I go straight to the people we are trying to reach. If we’re trying to reach teenagers, I ask teenagers what they would come to.

LK: It seems you are all on the same page. It is all about people reaching people. And you provide the essential teaching/preaching and training necessary for that to happen. Are there any specific training tools you have found helpful (besides Planet Wisdom)?

Tim: With our Student Ministry team, we don’t really use a specific curriculum. There are a couple of ministries that have good events and products that focus on evangelism training. One of the most prominent is Dare2Share Ministries. We use a couple of their products.

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

Barry: Regardless of the outreach promotion, person-to-person, friend-to-friend is always the best approach. Other formats prove to be more difficult.

Jeff: Regarding youth ministry, it would be our FFF events and the Planet Wisdom Conference.

Tim: I think the most positive response we’ve had from our outreaches is not because of the event itself, but because of the program. What I mean is that the youth (which is the area I work with) realize that there will be a consistent pattern of outreach events, in our case every month. Because they know that this will happen every month without fail, they understand that the opportunities will always be

present. Because of this, we see positive attendances at the events, no matter what they are.

LK: It seems you have earned the trust of your people, from kids to adults. Any further thoughts or words of advice for our readers on the value of this reality as fleshed out in your context?

Tim: You need to be intentional. If you're not intentional about relationships, they won't happen. Once the relationships have formed, if you're not intentional about outreach, it won't happen. And the reason we're intentional about it and put so much effort into it is because we have a compassion for the lost souls all around us.

LK: Do you have any outreach ideas that have become a regular element of church life? If so, how do you keep these ideas or programs from becoming stale?

Barry: VBS is, and has been, our best outreach to children. Our Christmas Eve Service is our best "church service" outreach event.

Jeff: Our MS and HS FFF events happen almost every month. We vary the locations, type of events, and so on. Our MS and HS Student Ministry Team youth help in suggesting different events that their non-Christian friends would be interested in.

Tim: Well, like I said above, I think we avoid becoming stale because we are constantly searching the intended audience for ideas of what to do. When their interests change, so do our events.

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

Barry: What I see is a church filled with some good people, and they are pretty self-motivated.

LK: Jeff or Tim, are their outreach ideas you would care to highlight that start with the youth programs of the church?



Jeff: Tim is our youth ministry outreach man. I'll let him speak to this question.

Tim: Well, our youth outreach program is a monthly cycle of outreach events. We use a three-step cycle modeled after CPR. CPR is what you use when you want to bring someone back to life. We use Spiritual CPR. In our 3-month cycle, the first event is just to "Cultivate" relationships. We don't do a gospel presentation, we might not even pray. It is solely designed to make new youth feel welcomed and comfortable in a church setting. The next month is when we "Plant the seed" of the Gospel. Our teenagers will share their faith in

creative and meaningful ways. We do not ask for any type of response, we just present it and let God work with it. The last piece of our 3-month cycle is a "Reaping" event. We again share the Gospel, but we give a chance for response of some type. This is rarely an "altar call" type of experience, but we do challenge students to think through their spiritual development (or lack thereof). So, you see our Cultivate-Plant-Reap cycle mirrors a farmer with soil.



LK: You should take this model on the road. I'm sure other churches could benefit from this kind of approach to youth ministry. Would it be okay if I invite other churches to contact you for help getting this (CPR model) started in their youth programs?

Tim: You certainly can. It's not a new model and we didn't develop it. It used to be published by SonLife Ministries, but they've changed things a bit. We continue to use their old model of CPR and it works pretty well. If people want to know more about it, they can certainly contact Mohn's Hill. I would be pleased to share the resources we've been using (610-773-3667).

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

Barry: It is important to remember that "we may plant, we may water, but it is GOD who gives the increase."

Tim: A heart for outreach and an ongoing commitment to outreach will have more of an impact than any specific outreach event. Plus, as I'm starting to notice with our group, there is a difference between OUTreach and INvite. Often, our "outreach" events are actually times when we INvite people. If the un-churched are uncomfortable coming to a church event, then we need to stop doing INvite events and really focus on OUTreach events where we meet them on their ground in love and service.

LK: Nicely said. Thank you for your time and shared insights.

How do you approach outreach? Program-focused? Or people-focused? Mohn's Hill proves that people-focused outreach attracts men and women, boys and girls to the Light that makes possible real life. Perhaps you might consider adjusting your outreach programming such that people are the priority. This might involve a slight tweaking of what you already do, or you might need a complete ministry overhaul. Be brave. Choose to design your outreach around the people you seek to reach.

Inspiration to Share Jesus:

by Les Cool

Can you name the last person with whom you shared Jesus? Haven't share Jesus lately? Lazy? Bewildered? Not motivated? You're not alone! If honest, most Christians would admit that they have experienced periods of inactivity in their ministry of witnessing for Jesus. Sometimes, it only takes a few words of motivation to get moving once again. Consider, if you will, the following quotes. I've found them rather helpful when I find myself "too quiet for Jesus."

"A person may go to heaven without health, without riches, without honors, without learning, without friends; but he can never go there without Christ." (JOHN DYER, 1699-1757)

He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (JESUS, Luke 10:2)



"It is impossible for us to be the children of God naturally, to love our enemies, to forgive, to be holy, to be pure, and it is certainly impossible for us to follow God naturally; consequently the fundamental fact to recognize is that we must be born again." (OSWALD CHAMBERS, 1874-1917)

"Salvation is worth working for. It is worth a man's going round the world on his hands and knees, climbing its mountains, crossing its valleys, swimming its rivers, going through all manner of hardship in order to attain it. But we do not get it in that way. It is to him who believes. (D.L. MOODY, 1837-1899)

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (PAUL, Romans 10:13-15)

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) or give me a call (302-395-1286). Let's find a way to share and encourage others by what you have accomplished.