

Christian Witnessing and Evangelism

Evangelism is, at its heart, sharing faith with others, particularly with those who are unchurched or disconnected, and inviting them to follow Jesus Christ as Christian disciples. (Guidelines – Evangelism, Cokesbury, 2004, page 8)

What Holston Conference said ...

We have a Spiritual Longings for More in Holston Conference. (from Vision Process at Annual Conference 2005)

- ◆ We long to be more evangelical, reaching out to the un-churched and those who have left the church.
- ◆ We long to be more inclusive and diverse, to move out of our comfort zones and reach out to those who are different, and to be truly inclusive of all regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, socio-economic status, age.
- ◆ We long to be more active and effective in outreach and in mission to those in our neighborhoods and those in the world.
- ◆ We long for growth in terms of deepened spirituality and commitment and in terms of having people join the church.
- ◆ We long for more action, less talk, and more going out and doing.
- ◆ We long to move from institutional maintenance to mission. We long for less politics and business and more living out of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.
- ◆ We long for more lay and clergy teamwork.
- ◆ We long to be more prophetic and less complacent to what goes on around us, to not be afraid to speak out boldly against those things that are contrary to the Kingdom of God – poverty, war, oppression, injustice, addiction.

Churches in Holston Conference that are receiving new members on Profession of Faith have these characteristics in common:

- Vital and energizing worship of varying styles and at varying times
- Working very hard at being a welcoming congregation
- Intentionally encouraging members to invite persons to church
- Very intentional ministries reaching out to younger families with children and youth
- Offering their buildings to persons in the community for very little or no charge
- Providing many mission opportunities for members
- Encouraging intentional faith sharing by their members

“Fifty Characteristics of Disciple-Making Congregations” by Dean McIntyre, General Board of Discipleship

- * Welcomes visitors.
- * Visitors become active members.
- * There is an open door policy. The congregation sees itself as a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.
- * Empty seat and open door.

Abingdon Press resource: GO FISH! series of T.I.M.E. – Together In Ministry Everyday. *T.I.M.E.* outlines an easy, effective, and cost-free way for churches to make an immediate impact on their community – have congregations volunteer 90 minutes every 90 days in some form of community service work with established local agencies engaged in helping with such issues as hunger, aging, school, grief counseling, or housing.
www.GoFish4People.com

From Guidelines – Evangelism: Sharing the Good News (by Roger K. Swanson; updated by Shirley F. Clement, General Board of Discipleship, 2004)

How to get started in evangelism

1. Build an Evangelism Ministry Team
2. Assess your current reality
3. Develop a shared vision
4. Establish a plan
5. Set your plan into motion

The **mission** of The United Methodist Church is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” (para. 120 of Book of Discipline)

We do this by (1) reaching out to people wherever they are and receiving them as they are, (2) relating them to God through Jesus Christ, (3) nurturing and equipping them for Christian discipleship, and (4) sending them out into the community to be the church in the family, the neighborhood, the community, and the world.

The F.R.A.N. Plan (Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbors) to reach the unchurched people we already know

1. Bring a friend Sunday
2. Establish relationships
3. Provide faith-sharing training
4. Visit your visitors
5. Tell your story
6. Make membership more meaningful
7. Relate people to God
8. Equip people for service

Practicing Radical Christian Hospitality

“Can the church practice Christian hospitality? Hospitality is not fixing up your church just the way you like it and then inviting others to come and enjoy it with you. That form of hospitality suffers under the needs of the new people invited in. Hospitality in the biblical sense is making space for new people to do what *they* need in their search for God and their practice of discipleship. Can the church make this shift?” (“Welcoming ‘Time Share’ Christians,” by Gil Rendle; *Circuit Rider*, United Methodist Publishing House, Nov/Dec/Jan 2008-09, p. 16)

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations, Robert Schnase, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2007, Chapter 1, “The Practice of Radical Hospitality”

“What is radical hospitality? *Radical* means ‘drastically different from ordinary practice, outside the norm,’ and so it provokes practices that exceed expectations, that go the second mile, that take welcoming the stranger to the max.”

What do people need that congregations offer?

1. People need to know that God loves them, that they are of supreme value, and that their life has significance.
2. People need to know that they are not alone; when facing difficulties, they are surrounded by a community of grace.
3. People need to know the peace that runs deeper than an absence of conflict, the hope that sustains them even through the most painful periods of grief, the sense of belonging that blesses them and stretches them.
4. People need to learn how to offer and accept forgiveness and how to serve and be served.
5. People need to know that life is not having something to live *on* but something to live *for*, that life comes not from taking for oneself but by giving of oneself.
6. People need a sustaining sense of purpose.

People do not need to be told what they need! Instead, most people discover their need for God’s grace and for the love of Christ through the experience of receiving it.

“Radical hospitality describes churches that strive without ceasing to exceed expectations and to accommodate and include others. ... With every ministry, they consider how to reach those who do not yet know Christ.”

“Word-of-mouth is still the most important form of human communication, and when people talk about congregations as places that make people feel welcome and loved, then the church thrives.”

“Bishop Sally Dyck once said that for the visitor or the person who is searching for spiritual help, ‘This Sunday is the only Sunday that counts!’”

Questions churches must regularly ask themselves:

- How are we doing at inviting guests and at teaching people to invite others?
- How are we doing at genuinely and authentically welcoming people?
- How can we offer Radical Hospitality we see in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ?
- And how can we do better?

Other items to consider related to Hospitality:

- Signs? Can people easily locate your church? Once they arrive, is it obvious how to get into the building?
- Are they greeted before they enter the building?
- Once inside, are they greeted and offered immediate assistance?
- Are persons invited to Sunday school and helped with finding a class or classroom?
- Is it easy for them to find their way to a classroom or sanctuary? If not, are signs available? Is a person available to assist?
- Are children made to feel safe and welcome? Do they know when and where their parents will come back to get them? Are the children assigned a “buddy” to be sure he or she has all needed supplies and knows where to go or what to do?
- Are youth introduced and welcomed enthusiastically? Does another youth in the church “buddy” with the visitor to make sure he or she feels welcome?
- In Adult Sunday school, are newcomers greeted formally by a class leader? Does someone write them a note thanking them for visiting and inviting them back?
- In worship, do you regularly welcome visitors? Do you ensure that they have a bulletin (if applicable)? Is the bulletin easy to follow, or does it assume that they know the Doxology and Lord’s Prayer (and not give the visitor info on where to find these rituals)?
- Do you have a method to ensure that each visitor is greeted by several persons before he or she leaves?
- How soon after visiting your church does a visitor receive communication from the church – ideally a visit, but perhaps a phone call? A loaf of bread?

Did You Know?

- 62% of Protestant churches have a church website.
- 25% of Protestant churches have a presence on such social networking sites as MySpace.
- 13% of Protestant churches have blogs or pages for people to interact with church leaders.
- Currently, 80-85% of people are finding their church on the web.
- 64% of wired Americans use the Internet for spiritual or religious purposes.

Sources: Barna Research, *Your Church* magazine, and the Bulletin of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

Resources for Evangelism

Web Sites and Phone Numbers

Holston Conference

Website: www.holston.org

Phone: 1-865-690-4080

E-mail: connectionalministries@holston.org

The Foundation for Evangelism

Website: www.evangelize.org

Phone: 1-800-737-8333 (toll free)

E-mail: info@evangelize.org

General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church

Website: www.gbod.org/evangelism

Phone: 1-877-899-2780 (toll free)

E-mail: gbod@gbod.org

Discipleship Resources

Website: www.discipleshipresources.org

Phone: 1-800-685-4370 (toll free)

E-mail: sclement@gbod.org

Books

The Faith-Sharing New Testament with the Psalms, prepared by H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris, Cokesbury Press, Nashville.

Faith-Sharing: Dynamic Christian Witnessing by Invitation. Revised and Expanded. H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris, Discipleship Resources, Nashville.

How United Methodists Share Their Faith, Rodney E. Wilmoth, Abingdon Press, Nashville.

Eight Life-Enriching Practices of United Methodists, Henry H. Knight III, Abingdon Press, Nashville.

Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News, Rick Richardson, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois.

Faith-Sharing Congregation: Developing a Strategy for The Congregation as Evangelist, Roger K. Swanson and Shirley F. Clement, Discipleship Resources, Nashville.

Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation. Evangelism: Sharing the good news, Roger K. Swanson, updated by Shirley F. Clement, General Board of Discipleship, Nashville.

What You Should Know About Sharing Your Faith, pamphlet, purchased at Cokesbury Bookstore. Prepared by Classic Scriptography.

Witness: Exploring and Sharing Your Christian Faith, 25-week study available from Discipleship Resources, Nashville. www.gbod.org/witness or www.evangelismwitness.org.