

STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY, GROWING CHURCH: EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP (#1)

By Bob Young

When you dream about your church's future, you do not think about having a church that simply exists—you imagine a flourishing church. You want to see the church grow. You want to see people discover Jesus, mature, and touch the lives of others. Many church leaders wonder how the church can flourish. Here is a short list of things you must do intentionally in order to thrive.

Intentionality Is the Key to Church Growth. What does your church do INTENTIONALLY?

The key to becoming a thriving church is to be intentional. The key to a thriving church is making specific plans and following through. There should not be lots of activities happening regularly that lack an intentional purpose. Once you begin evaluating activities and programs with intentionality, once you begin to evaluate and eliminate activities that do not advance the purpose of the church, you will be surprised by how naturally growth begins to occur.

Successful companies build on one really important thing: they have to tell you the next step to take, or you will not take it. If you sign up for a free trial, you most likely will not go ahead and subscribe unless it is very clear how to do it. If you buy something on Amazon, you will be shown how to become a Prime member. The studies are clear: people are more likely to act when you intentionally help them take the next step.

Churches that grow quickly and consistently make the next step clear. They do not reveal everything at once; instead, they intentionally lead people toward each point in the journey to becoming a member of the community.

In other articles, I have explained the 5-4-3-2-1 model that I developed and used effectively in local church ministry. The result was hundreds of baptisms. The model is a simple way to organize and maintain contact with people. The goal is to help people come ever closer to Jesus. The model looks very much like a corporate marketing funnel. You can read it about it here: <http://www.bobyoungrsources.com/articles/54321-evangelism.pdf>

A quick summary for those who do not want to follow the link and read the entire article.

- 5, I want to get to know you
- 4, I want you to attend an activity of the church on your own initiative
- 3, I want to study the Bible with you
- 2, I want you to respond to the gospel
- 1, I want you to become assimilated, to be part, to be involved in the local church

These five steps that we used to organize the evangelism efforts in the local church are based on four essential truths. Perhaps you will like my model so well that you will adapt it and use it pretty much as is. But in case you want to develop your own model, here are the four essentials to keep in mind.

First, figure out how to contact people, meet people, get organized, and maintain contact with people

Church growth begins with making connections. Committed church members aren't made after one or two interactions. You need to be able to build a relationship with them, and you cannot leave the burden on them to foster this relationship. This means that you need to communicate with them continually and regularly.

Email is a powerful way to do this. With an email list, you can build a non-invasive tool for interacting with people regularly. Provided you do not burn that bridge by emailing too often or sending content the people do not want, you have an opportunity to draw them into your church and set them up to become active and committed members.

With very little effort and know-how, you can even set up a series of emails that you send to people when they are added to the list. Examples of things that could be included in these emails are:

- Your goals and mission
- Ministry and volunteer opportunities

- Information about various church ministries
- Facts about staff members

You must prioritize getting information from people. For church growth, it is of the utmost importance that you collect contact information. This cannot be a passive effort—it must be your number-one goal. Without securing contact information, you are simply hoping that you gave a good enough first impression to make people want to return. When you have a way to contact them again, you have the ability to begin building a connection.

If you want to grow an email list, you must make email capture the number one priority when gathering contact information. People are fairly comfortable giving out an email address, even when they might be hesitant to give out their home address. Once you have zeroed in on emails as your most coveted contact information, you can tailor your contact cards to make them easier to fill out. The fewer fields people have to fill out, the more completed forms you will receive. Consider incentives to encourage people to fill out cards—a gift basket or coffee cup for visitors who turn in cards.

Second, keep before the church that the purpose of the church is evangelism and discipleship

The church that is not reminded continually of this truth will lose sight of it.

Members that are not constantly reminded will not be involved or stay involved in evangelism. Members that lose sight of the purpose will want to start a host of peripheral ministries that will compete for the energy and focus necessary to grow a healthy church.

Third, create a clear path that turns visitors into members

What is your plan for turning a visitor into a member? Do you have one? I am not referring to a general, meandering idea of how someone goes from visiting your church to being a member. What are your church's steps to make someone a member? How do you plan to help people through the steps?

Too many churches are more reactive than proactive when it comes to getting people involved. They are waiting for visitors to initiate every step of the relationship. This is a huge mistake. You must have a firm grasp on how to move people through the process. You need to have team members in place to help get people to the next step.

This process needs to be unique to your church, but here is a sample flowchart to help get you started:

- Get their contact information.
- Meet with them to find out what their interests are.
- Suggest volunteer opportunities and introduce them to others with similar interests in the church.
- Send the first of the introductory emails.
- Send an email on Friday giving a teaser for the Sunday sermon and invite them to attend again.
- On their second visit, offer to take them to lunch where you can get to know them, share your vision for the church, and help them imagine how they might be part of that vision.

Whatever your process for assimilation, it needs to be reproducible and the staff needs to understand how it works. Once you have something concrete in place, you can retool until it works seamlessly.

Fourth, create a clear path that turns members into disciples

What is your plan for turning new members into genuine disciples, followers of Jesus? (The next article in this mini-series will be available soon.)