

Everyday Missions

By Bob Young

Note: Ben Connelly recently wrote a brief article on this topic. That article provided the germ thoughts for this article which comes from my own experience in local ministry.

One of the great challenges of ministry is to focus on the priority of missions and evangelism. Many local ministers are great organizers, can motivate members and manage a host of church programs, and are not at all skilled when it comes to winning people to Jesus. Disciple-making is low on the priority list for many ministers. (There is a reason we do not call our local ministers evangelists in the churches of Christ.)

The first little church I preached at insisted on calling me the evangelist. That has probably impacted by ministry as much as any other single factor. It doesn't take long in local ministry to realize that what the average local church wants the minister to do is completely different than what the Bible describes. The average church can be satisfied with reasonably good preaching, a little growth, and a few programs that show we are doing something.

I worked with a suburban church that was situated less than one mile from a rapidly growing area. In fact, the area was growing so fast that the entire township (6 miles by 6 miles) was incorporated as a new city. Should we not in the fear of the Lord pray that somehow we will be able to seize such opportunities?

We can easily become satisfied in local ministry, but as Connelly writes about his own experience, the truth is that "there would always be more people 'out there' than there would be 'in here.'"

I eventually learned to cope with the challenge I personally felt in local ministry. Across 20 years of full-time ministry with two churches before I began work in Christian higher education, the churches grew magnificently with God's power, tripling in one case and almost doubling in the other. How was such possible?

First, I learned to balance my responsibilities in the local church and the responsibilities I felt toward those outside. I preached to the local church the responsibility of all to touch others and share the gospel. I sought to make evangelism the calling card of the church, to define the church by its heart for sharing the gospel through local evangelism and ministry. I identified myself as preacher rather than minister, including the preaching of the gospel anywhere and everywhere.

Second, I lived what I preached. I pursued evangelism and missions in my spare time. I found prospects at the grocery store and everywhere I went. I sent up Bible studies with non-Christians. I helped members introduce Jesus to their neighbors. I led by example, loving my members, but also loving their extended families, working in service projects in the community, and seeking disciples of Jesus. I spent many evenings that were technically not work time teaching evangelistic Bible studies.

Third, I involved as many others as possible in the work of the church. The work of evangelism cannot depend on one person, or even a small group within the church. I preached about the gift of hospitality, the gift of friendship, the gift of meeting new people, and many other such gifts, all of which can support evangelism. The church became involved in looking for prospects, introducing friends, neighbors, and coworkers to the church, and living the reality that the church is God's instrument to take the gospel to the nations.