

# TEN WAYS TO KEEP A CHURCH FOCUSED ON EVANGELISM

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Evangelism is summarised by Robert Warren as ‘the processes whereby people become disciples of Jesus Christ’. Those processes are helpfully described by missiologist David Bosch as ‘evangelism is the core, heart and centre of mission; it consists in the proclamation of salvation in Christ to non-believers in announcing forgiveness of sins, calling people to repentance and faith in Christ, inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life in the power of the Holy Spirit’.

My interest in these definitions is not in discussing their merits but recognising through them that evangelism is a process, is centred on Jesus Christ and involves a new life being transformed by God’s Spirit and lived out in company with other believers.

Therefore evangelism is a meant to be a normal part of the life of a church. This helps us recognise the need to ensure it does not dissipate over time to an occasional set of actions but remains in the DNA of a church’s life. So here are my top ten ways to keep a church focused on evangelism:

## 1. BUILD IT INTO YOUR VISION

A church’s vision must make it abundantly clear how and why evangelism is at the heart of church life. Here is a helpful section from a Baptist church’s vision:

‘We aspire to see people being introduced in creative and imaginative ways to the love of God. Social events, introduction to Christianity courses



and lively and relevant services will all be used to attract people who aren’t Christians. Every member and attender will be empowered to share and live out their faith wherever they are. The people who are a part of [this church] will be challenged and encouraged to build friendships and invite people to things. The church will also be going out in to the community to make the love of God known.’

I know from years of observation that this church lives out this vision and regularly reviews how it is being enacted.

## 2. MAKE IT A PART OF YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Ensure that prayer for evangelism is part of the church’s gatherings, large and small, and that Christians are encouraged to form prayer partnerships

or triplets to pray for their non-Christian contacts to develop a spiritual hunger and openness to the good news of Christ. Without prayerful dependence on God our evangelism becomes a recruiting drive.

### 3. EXAMINE HOW YOU COMMUNICATE

Consider how the good news is communicated in your church. Is it clear to the membership and those who hear the gospel through them that God's love is offered unconditionally but then involves a life-long relationship with Jesus, which will be both enriching and costly? This means that a church will always see evangelism and discipleship as integral and seek to be consistent as it develops and communicates both. Preaching should assume the presence of those who are sceptics or strugglers in the realm of faith. How does our message relate to them? We must demystify what we do as we gather for worship. Explaining what and why we do certain things is not the same as dumbing down.

### 4. ENCOURAGE TESTIMONY

Encourage the regular sharing of testimony of those who have come to faith in Jesus as well as hearing from those who are seeking to share their faith in multiple contexts and different ways.

### 5. DEVELOP MULTIPLE ACCESS POINTS

Ensure that the Church offers multiple access points to people who are curious about faith or are in need of God's love manifested through compassionate service freely offered by God's people to the wider community. This can include social events which help Christians and their non-believing friends to simply share life and recreation with others. It can also include access through Alpha, Christianity Explored and

other opportunities to discover what Christians believe in a relational setting, whilst acknowledging that such courses will not suit everyone. Others have questions which these courses simply do not adequately approach or address.

### 6. LISTEN CAREFULLY

The preceding point calls for evangelism to be seen as something other than what we say, but rather it involves deep listening to people's heartfelt questions and objections to Christianity. Apologetics and evangelism belong together and both must be undertaken with humility and a genuine capacity to listen and ask questions rather than only provide answers.

### 7. FOCUS ON THE FRONTLINE

Evangelism must not be limited to invitational events where the church gathers with those willing to join with us. The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) identifies that wherever a Christian spends the greater part of their week – workplace, local community, recreational activities – is their frontline. That is the main place to share faith, and therefore should be the focus of how we equip people to live out their faith in such places.

### 8. KEEP IT A PRIORITY FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH

Ensure that evangelism is seen as a priority for the whole church. Gifted evangelists will be a minority in a congregation, but evangelism is a shared task of all God's people. The church leader and the congregation are mutually accountable for sharing our faith in Jesus, and that includes an honest admission that none of us finds it easy. Within this mutual commitment the leader must both model and prioritise time and energy to sharing their faith in Jesus beyond the life of the gathered church. Leaders need non-Christian friends otherwise we lose our edge.

### 9. ENGAGE WITH CULTURE

Recognise that the wider culture, which will consist of a mix of secular, pluralist and postmodern thinking, is increasingly distanced from the beliefs and assumptions which undergird the lives of many Christians. To that end we need to ensure that, whilst the gospel is unchanging, the means and nuances of sharing it will need to tune in to those we encounter. At the same time, to be evangelistically engaged for the long haul, each congregation needs to examine the ways it unwittingly builds cultural brick walls which prevent enquirers spending time with us. It may be that they need to belong before they believe on the journey to personal faith and discipleship.

### 10. FOSTER NEW EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH

Increasingly, there is a need to form new expressions of church, develop resource churches and focus on unreached generations which require a level of cultural agility beyond the ability of many congregations. Regrettable but true. We are simply too conservative and lacking in savviness in relation to fast-moving contemporary cultural transitions.



Recognition of this reality need not mean we are simply addressing a consumerist approach to church. Evangelism, alongside ministries of compassion, good apologetics and long-term commitment to developing mature disciples, simply requires adaptable patterns of church life and culture – it's the corporate expression of being all things to all people so that some may be saved (1 Corinthians 9:22).



#### FOR REFLECTION

1. How is the priority of evangelism presented, modelled and renewed in your congregational life and in the lives of the leadership?
2. What are the multiple access points for a non-Christian to hear the good news of Jesus, see it lived out and have it explained in a way they can relate to in your church life and community engagement? How can these access points be effectively increased?
3. 'Evangelism involves listening as well as verbally sharing the good news'. How are members of the congregation currently being equipped to share their faith in a way which relates to their contacts, personality and gifts?
4. Most churches are simply too conservative to adapt with agility to fast-moving culture, yet the need for new forms of church with an evangelistic DNA is essential. How do you intend to engage with that challenge?

