

Leading a Church to Be Evangelistic: Getting the Nursery Ready **By Chuck Lawless**

Suppose that within a few hours of reading this column, you learn that nine months from now a baby will be born into your home (I realize that for some of you, that thought is *terribly* disconcerting . . . but go with my illustration!). What would you do to prepare for that baby's coming?

You would get the nursery ready by painting the walls and buying the furniture. Perhaps you would register at a baby store so that others might supply the incidentals. If you learn the baby's gender, then you start buying clothing. Stockpiling diapers becomes a must. The point is this: you get ready because you know that new life is coming to your home.

That approach should be no different in the church. Leading a church to be evangelistic—that is, leading a church to reach non-believers who then experience new life in Christ—requires our churches to be ready for the new life that God gives. Why should God bless our churches with evangelistic growth if He knows that our nursery is not ready to take care of the baby believers? Why would God entrust new believers to a church that will let them flounder because no discipling strategy is in place?

The disciplines of evangelism and discipleship are so interconnected that they are two sides of the same coin: evangelism leads to conversion, and discipleship leads the convert to growth. Evangelism without discipleship results in inch-deep believers, and discipleship without evangelism produces a classroom more than a Great Commission church. Hence, leading a church to be evangelistic also demands leading a church to develop an ongoing discipleship strategy.

Even as I write this article, though, I am aware of a potential danger. Because most churches have so poorly done discipleship, I fear that those who want to make a difference will spend all of their energy fixing the discipleship problem—and evangelism will suffer as a consequence. In fact, the church that focuses solely on filling the discipleship void will seldom get back to evangelism. For that reason, the solution is “both/and” rather than an “either/or” approach. The church must do evangelism even as she also addresses the discipleship issue.

The easiest way to do both is *not* to devise a new program; instead, it is to return to the time-tested method of discipling through mentoring. Pastor, do you want to lead your church to be evangelistic? Start by asking God to direct you to two or three church members in whose lives you will invest yourself. Challenge them in their own walk with Christ. Show them how to read the Bible and pray. Help them to understand their spiritual gifts. Take them with you as do outreach. Model evangelism for them. Pray with them and for them. Hold them accountable to developing relationships with non-believers. In this entire process, equip them to disciple new believers—and expect them to do so.

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More specifically, the discipler will walk alongside the new believer, responding to questions, guiding through temptations, teaching Bible study and prayer, and encouraging in times of struggle. The devil will still aim his arrows at new believers, but he must go around the discipler to get to that baby in Christ. Grounded in faith through the help of a mentor/discipler, the new believer becomes a strong witness for the life-changing power of the gospel.

Don't miss this truth: getting the nursery ready for new believers does not require a fully staffed discipleship team with a fully developed program. No, a discipleship strategy begins with one discipler who is ready to guide new believers toward growth. *Any* pastor with a heart for evangelism can find and equip at least one believer to do this task.

To help you get started, here is a checklist of characteristics to watch for in that potential mentor/discipler:

- An obvious enthusiasm for God
- A desire to learn and apply God's truths
- A willingness to set aside time for discipling
- A God-given eagerness to help others
- A likeable spirit that attracts others

A pastor who mentors a few, followed by the few discipling new converts – that's the kind of evangelistic nursery that God blesses. Any church can start building this kind of nursery today.