

**LEADING A CHURCH TO BE EVANGELISTIC:
CONNECTING WITH NON-BELIEVERS
By Chuck Lawless**

If you want to check the pulse of your church's evangelism, try this simple exercise with your church members. Ask them to write two lists: (1) the names of ten believers with whom they are close enough that they could share a prayer concern with them; and (2) the names of ten non-believers with whom they are close enough that they might share the gospel with them. I have asked hundreds of churches to work through this exercise with me.

My evidence is only anecdotal, but I feel safe in stating this conclusion – the longer a person is in church, and the higher he moves in the church's leadership, the more likely it is that he will have trouble completing list #2. One explanation for our failure to reach non-believers is simply that we do not *know* many non-believers well. The typical church has become a cocoon to protect from the world rather than a place of rearmament to engage the world with the gospel.

Most church members need help in reconnecting with non-believers. If you want your church to be an evangelistic church, think about these ways to help your members reconnect with those that need to hear the gospel.

Teach believers to see others as God sees them.

In the midst of my busy life, I am often reminded of the words in Matthew 9:36—
“Seeing the people, He [Jesus] felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus saw people, looked into their souls, and grieved over their condition. He saw them through the eyes of eternity.

Seldom do we see people that way. We see our neighbors, the bank teller, the gas station attendant, the barber, the mechanic, and others – without every wondering about their spiritual conditions. We do not always “have compassion for them” as Jesus does.

The first step in reconnecting with the non-believing world is to change the way we view others. Everyone with whom we have contact is a human being created in God's image and in need of redemption. *Everyone* is a “sheep without a shepherd” apart from Jesus. Of course, we must love others simply because we are commanded to love, but we must love them enough to want them to know about a personal relationship with Christ.

Clear the church calendar at least one night per week.

As a church consultant, I am amazed by how busy many churches are. Events are scheduled almost every night of the week, and “good” members are expected to be there for everything. It is no wonder, then, that these members have little time to develop relationships with non-believers.

Determine as a church to avoid this calendar chaos as much as possible. Perhaps you will decide that no church events may occur on Thursday and Friday nights, unless the event

is clearly designated for outreach. Then, *leave those nights clear*, and challenge church members to use one of those nights to invest in relationships with non-believers. Invite others to dinner. See a play together. Go to a ball game. Visit the park with your children. Get to know the non-believers, and prayerfully seek opportunities to speak about Christ.

Encourage the church to get involved in the community.

Remember the exercise I encouraged at the beginning of this article? Many church members cannot name ten non-believers with whom they have a strong relationship. One way to counter this problem is to help the church to see community involvement as outreach opportunities.

Think about the possibilities. The parent/teacher association. The Chamber of Commerce. Community softball leagues. A bowling league. The neighborhood association. Outdoor groups. The Kiwanis Club. Hobby groups. All of these possibilities—and many others in your context—provide opportunities for your church members to get involved with people outside of the church. Challenge your members to join groups, seeing every relationship as an opportunity to evangelize.

Intentionally pray for non-believers by name.

Paul's prayer for Israel was that they be saved (Rom. 10:1). Our prayer for others is that they, too, would be saved. One simple way to connect with a non-believing world is to begin praying intentionally for individual non-believers.

Encourage your church members to begin praying specifically for at least three non-believers. Guide them in their praying by using this prayer outline:

“God, I pray for _____ that:

- You would open his blinded mind (2 Cor. 4:3-4)
- You would transfer him to the kingdom of your Son (Col. 1:13)
- You would free him from the enemy's power (Acts 26:18)
- You would make him a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)

Something just happens to us when we start praying for others. God redirects our focus, changes our thinking, and moves in our heart. Get your church praying for non-believers—and watch what God does as your members reconnect with those who need to hear the gospel.