

# Local church evangelism- a short discussion checklist



Written by Michael Green

*The Lord did not leave behind a 'crusade' to carry on his work when he returned to heaven, or even an Alpha Course! He left behind a community of frail, broken, but redeemed people - the church. And the church is his main way of extending the frontiers of the Kingdom of God.*

And if the local church is warm and welcoming, if there is an outward orientation on the part of minister and congregation alike, then it will become a magnet in the locality. People will want to bring their friends along. It will grow, just in the normal course of events!

On the contrary, it will not grow if there is no provision for youth, if there is little love, if the services are dreary, if there are lots of 'insider' attitudes and language, and if there are constant appeals for money!

Here are thirteen aspects of local church evangelism. Are they happening in your church? Should they be?

**1. Prayer for individuals.** Not much of that happens in most churches. But in parts of the two-thirds world where the gospel is growing so fast, they depend on prayer! In the West we go for methods, but we do not have because we do not ask (James 4:2). Remember it is God who is the evangelist! Prayer opens the way!

**2. Testimony** has always been powerful, but now more than ever because of the postmodern culture and the widespread impression that Christianity has had its day. Every Christian has a story of the interaction of their life with that of Jesus. Just show that Jesus is alive and can be met today. There is no need to be fearful; nobody can rubbish your personal experience!

**3. Invitation.** Many outreach events are spoiled because people do not invite others. Of course there is a cost: an attractive lifestyle, time spent in developing relationships, hospitality, sharing our friends' interests. But pay that price and you can invite them to a suitable event and expect a 'Yes', not because they want to come but because they want to please you! Random invitations rarely work. We need to build bridges. 'Do go' does not work. 'Do come with me' often will.

**4. Alpha and similar courses** are one of the most effective forms of outreach a church can lay on! They suit postmodern culture which is suspicious of authority figures, disenchanted with institutions, doubtful about truth claims, confused about personal identity, looking for reality, short on hope - and yet hungry for spiritual experience. The 'What is the meaning of life' question grips. So do the humour, the food, the quality videos, the companionship, the Holy Spirit weekend. There are other courses similar to Alpha - or make up your own! And remember: course meetings must be supplemented with good personal care.



**5. Hospitality.** Jesus knew what he was doing when he left us a meal to remember him by! A good meal breaks down suspicion, encourages openness, and makes people receptive. Events based round food work really well.

You will need a speaker who has charm, directness and tact; you need a well-produced invitation card, and response cards to use after the talk is over. Ensure there are nurture groups or `discovery groups` in place to feed people into after the event. I find this one of the most fruitful of all approaches today.

**6. The guest service** for which there is very careful preparation, much prayer, intensive emphasis on inviting unchurched friends, the use of testimony and very familiar music, and a challenging talk for decision. The challenge may be to a one-off decision for Christ, but most people need more time these days, so make it a challenge for joining an enquirers group. Done imaginatively - say three times a year – this is very effective in the ongoing life of the church.

**7. Special occasions.** If the minister is an evangelist, he or she will find services for special occasions invaluable. People come to the church looking for something – they may not know what it is. But we know it is Christ! Baptism preparation, marriage preparation, and very careful work at and after funerals, are often pathways to a living faith.

**8. The use of neutral ground.** Business or professional meetings, and men's breakfasts or women's lunches, can be very easy to invite folk to, and very effective given the right context and speaker. I have found that large, appropriate meetings for doctors, lawyers, etc have led to many joining enquirers' groups, and coming to faith. Concerts with a talk are also invaluable; so is anything to do with sport - especially, but certainly not exclusively, for young people.

The use of film in a variety of ways is still very acceptable, especially with a discussion to follow. If you have a competent apologist, a debate is a massive draw. A carol service is a wonderful way to present the gospel – J. John leads hundreds of people to Christ every year through carol services.

**9. Taking a team away** is a marvellous way both to serve other localities and to bind your own team together in unforgettable fellowship. This may be a large mission team, or it may be a carfull of people for a single event; either way it is invariably better than a solo outing. Complementary gifts, a whole range of experience, the testimonies, the fellowship, the variety of personalities – and it stimulates the people at the receiving end to do likewise.

**10. Leisure-based events** like a golf match or soccer tournament, a sports day, a skiing holiday, hill walking, sailing – these draw people together and often draw them to Christ. Any shared experience can work – dominoes, gardening, whatever!

**11. Evangelism in the home.** This could be an invitation to supper and conversation; it could be a group meeting in the home to do an investigative Bible study, to have an enquirers group, to hear some interesting person speak on 'My God and my job', or perhaps to mark a crisis or celebrate something joyful.

**12. Visiting door-to-door** seems almost to have died out, but it opens the way for evangelism. YWAM and OM both major on visiting and questionnaires in the streets, and selling Christian material in shops or malls. In the US, Evangelism Explosion is a method of evangelism based on visiting, as is Michael Wooderson's *Good News Down Our Street* in the UK. Dan Cozens' 'Walk of 1000 Men' sees many men from a local parish join teams for visiting, small meetings, etc in a part of the country where careful preparations have been made. They are fed by the local saints and sleep on church floors.



**13. Community Service** is one of the best ways the local church can impact its area. It needs to analyze where the real need is and then seek to supply it, whether it be prison visiting, adoption services, soup kitchens, gyms, a church coffee shop or restaurant, the occasional fiesta, services to the aged etc. Not only is this Christlike service, it wins us the right to be heard: people start to wonder why we offer something for free like this.

There are countless other ways in which outreaches can be effected. One church I know did a 'Strictly Come Dancing' event; another ran a discussion group for mothers after they had dropped off their kids for school; another ran an Any Questions at a neutral venue. Passion plays in the streets have been invaluable for centuries; open air drama-and-testimony events in populous places, accompanied by plenty of personal workers ready to talk with the people watching, prove very effective. *On the Move* is now an international means of open air outreach with a free barbecue, music, and people to talk to those who come. They are amazed to find that there is such a thing as a free lunch after all!

Imagination, passion, wholeheartedness, prayer, and every member ministry – these are the qualities needed. And in today's post-Christian society, the more that can happen off church property the better!

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